

"Love is the perception of individuals.
Love is the extremely difficult realisation
that something other than oneself is real.
Love, and so art and morals,
is the discovery of reality."

Iris Murdoch

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Preface

“These are not books, lumps of lifeless paper, but minds alive on the shelves”, said the Scotsman Gilbert Highet, and the quotation has been hanging on a slip of paper on a board over my desk for a long time. The “minds alive” I have met through reading books – from *The Musicians of Bremen* when I was five and sat under mamma’s sewing table, to Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow*, which I am reading at the moment – have all been important to me and the work I have done. But the “minds alive” that I have encountered *outside* of books during the last years have been of the utmost value to me. I have written a book about voices, and about voices in dialogue. And although the voice I “speak” with is mine, it is a voice saturated and conditioned by the voices of those people who have challenged me, taught me, annoyed me, supported me and loved me. The dialogues have been many, and the voices sometimes overwhelming. However, I would never have been where I am or who I am without all the people whose voices I have been surrounded by, or the sometimes loud, sometimes quiet dialogues I have been part of. I would like to bring attention to some of the most important voices I know.

I have often said that Jan-Olav Henriksen must be one of the most gifted supervisors there is. His knack for seeing and listening to the individual student (in this case me, but I know it applies to others) is exceptional. He has found out how my brain works (realizing that it might not be quite the same, or as quick – as his own), and given me the freedom I have needed to follow my (sometimes weird, sometimes actually rather interesting) hunches. He has provided support when my confidence has been low and life has been difficult, and he has pegged me down a notch or two when my ambition to write *A Study of Everything of Importance* has become dominant. He has identified what is needed to get me to actually *write* the texts I tend to fancifully draw in coloured pencils rather than articulate, and given amazingly quick – and usually very helpful – responses when I have e-mailed him stuff to read. Sometimes his advice is brilliant, other times not. The work I have done is mine, and the lesser aspects of my contribution are of my own doing. I do hope, though, that much of what *is* good work in this book, will really and truly reflect the importance of Jan-Olav’s voice and guidance.

Many have read and commented on parts of my manuscript in its various stages. From being protective and shy with regard to my own texts, I now realize what a gift it is to be able to present unfinished work to clever men and women for scrutiny and help. I cannot thank all, but some must be mentioned and thanked: at the annual seminars for doctoral students at the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (MF) I have received valuable advice from Gunnar

Heiene, Torleiv Austad, Olav Fykse Tveit and not least, my good friend and colleague Ulla Schmidt (who not only has commented my text in the seminar, but also read large chunks of the manuscript and been of the utmost help!) At NTNU in Trondheim, Sigurd Bergmann was helpful in the early stages of my work. *The Nordic Society of Theological Ethics* has been crucial to my academic identity, and I thank Carl-Henric Grenholm, Svend Andersen and Jaana Hallamaa for reading and commenting pieces of my work. At national doctoral courses in theology, I have received points of view from Trond Skard Dokka, Kirsten Busch-Nielsen, Knut Alfsvåg and Svein Aage Christoffersen, and at the Nordic Conferences for Systematic Theology in Helsinki and Oslo, Carl-Reinhold Bråkenhielm and Paul Leer-Salvesen have commented short texts. Thank you all so very much. Had I listened to everything you all have said, I'd never have finished, but I hope that the best of your advice has been respected!

I would also like to thank colleagues from MF – all my lunch-friends from the round table in the corner, the department of Systematic Theology, the administration, the computer-lads and the librarians. Each and every one of my fellow doctoral students also deserve thankful attention for the good atmosphere and helpful environment you have provided for me. From MF I would also especially like to thank Hanne Løland – I have enjoyed your wise and open friendliness (and silliness) since our very first days as young students in Oslo. Colleagues from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Lithuania, Estonia and Moçambique; your voices and friendships have been invaluable and enriching! Some friends in particular must be mentioned and thanked; Anniken Hagelund, Anne Langås Handeland, Tone Anne Hvalen and Sverre Stenseng. Thanks also to my family, the Eriksens: Mamma Janet, thanks for teaching me to read and write and to love books. Pappa Bent, thanks for your enthusiasm and challenging discussions over the years. Thanks to sister Esther (and her Jon Martin) and brother Lars for creative and stimulating friendships – and to nephew Edvard, for reminding me that sometimes, fish are more important than books. (Auntie) Elizabeth Laird McDowall has provided encouragement and excellent help with my English – the suggestions you made and the grammar you taught me have made a huge difference! Thank you all.

Finally: quite late in the process of working on this project, Staffan Nilsson entered my life. In meeting him, me, my life and my work have taken new turns, and it has made me happier and more content than I have ever been!

Flemingsberg 2005,

Maud M.L. Eriksen

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Abbreviations

Iris Murdoch

EM/AD: “Against Dryness” (*Existentialists and Mystics*)

EM/FS: “The Fire and the Sun. Why Plato Banished the Artists” (*Existentialists and Mystics*)

EM/SBR: “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited” (*Existentialists and Mystics*)

FHD: *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

MGM: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*

SOG: *The Sovereignty of Good*

Paul Ricoeur

OA: *Oneself as Another*

Mikhail Bakhtin

DI: *The Dialogic Imagination*

PART I: Postmodernism and Moral Authority

1. Introduction

1.1. Good and Evil on the Cinema Screen and Beyond

During the time I have spent working on this thesis, the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy has rolled over cinema screens, gaining immense popularity.¹ Many years ago I tried reading the novels, but was never really taken by them. However, as I usually enjoy creative fantasy and momentous stories, costumes and sets, I was willing to give Tolkien another chance when the films were launched. I was not particularly fascinated by them this time either, and have wondered why. A reason for my lack of enthusiasm, I have found, is because I do not find the characters interesting with respect to their portrayal of good and evil. To be fair, the trilogy is a fairy-tale, albeit a very complex one. It was never meant to be a moral philosophical treatise on the nature of good and evil. Nevertheless, I realised that my personal reaction to the films corresponded quite closely to the motivational heart of my concerns in this thesis. Why was this?

A phrase often used to explain why the trilogy is so compelling, is that it is about “the battle between good and evil”. And it is. Blatantly, obviously, boringly so. I can understand the fascination many have for the intricate world of fantasy that Tolkien has constructed, but what annoys me with the grandiose schema of Middle Earth is primarily that the ideas of good and evil which the Tolkien films represent, are so very fixed and given. Good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings* are much too easily recognizable. I have little trouble identifying them. There is little ambivalence concerning who is what. The story winds its way through challenge after challenge for those we know to be good: Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf and the others. They fight against Sauron, Saruman and the Orks – who are so clearly evil. Even when Frodo struggles against the power of the evil Ring and therefore can appear to be an ambivalent character, he is always fundamentally a representative of the good, although he is temporarily empowered by a form of external evil. The excitement of the narrative concerns the question of which side wins, and how. It has little to do with questioning and destabilizing already authoritative conceptualizations of good or evil.

¹ Tolkien, J.R.R.: *The Lord of the Rings* (London 1995, 1st eds. 1954-55) and the films: *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002), *The Return of the King* (2003). New Line Productions, INC (USA/New Zealand). Directed by Peter Jackson.

I have asked myself if there is anything in the description of good or evil in the Tolkien films which truly challenges my understanding of these concepts. Do they provoke me into rethinking those things which I hold to be good, and therefore wish to live by? I think not. At least, I was not confronted with any such challenge. My point is not to say that *The Lord of the Rings* is bad literature or filmatic art, because I do not believe this is the case. It is rather to point out that what bores me with Tolkien is not an uncommon feature of philosophical and theological ethics either! There too, moral concepts such as good and evil have for a very long time had a fixed and given authoritative status. Theologians and philosophers have sought the “true” meanings of moral language, trying to find formal and authoritative definitions of concepts – preferably as unambiguously as possible.

I take such a formal approach to moral language and ethics to be insufficient in a contemporary context. I will, therefore, attempt to outline an alternative approach to speaking about concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and the authority, or persuasive power, of moral language. This I shall do by studying another story about “the battle between good and evil”, in which the characters that represent good and evil are ambivalent, challenging and, in my opinion, more interesting than Frodo and Sauron. I shall, however, begin this examination and discussion at some distance from the inhabitants of Middle Earth and all other literary characters, by first entering the field of moral authority and action from the perspective of a theological ethicist.

1.2. The Task and its Horizon

The central task for theological ethics can ultimately be seen as a quest for understanding the will of God for creation. As the North-American theologian James M. Gustafson writes: “What is right for man has to be determined in relation to man’s place in the universe and, indeed, in relation to the will of God for all things as that might dimly be discerned.”² This, however, will always be an ideal (and impossible) end-goal, as no-one has full or direct access to the will of God. Indeed, in the context of postmodern discourse³ one cannot even un-

² Gustafson, James: *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective. Vol. I Theology and Ethics*. Chicago 1981, p.99. This is not an indisputable claim. Most Western ethics, theological ethics included, sees the task of ethics to be “concerned with what is morally right and wrong about human actions and what is morally good and bad about the consequences of actions.” Gustafson, same book p.87. I basically subscribe to Gustafson’s argument for seeing theological ethics from a theocentric, not anthropocentric perspective. I shall later return to what this involves.

³ Note the phrase “postmodern discourse”, which is deliberately used to underline that I do not in this thesis (primarily) see postmodernism as a description a particular brand of society, nor as a chronological denominator. Rather, I adhere to a view of postmodernism as being a name for a certain mode

critically presuppose the reality of a God who wills something. I do not say that God as active being in relation to humanity and all of creation cannot be thought to exist. Nor is it my intention to underscore the relevance such a presupposition can have. The point is, at this stage, that the *conditions* for how one can speak about God, religion and morality in the context of a contemporary theoretical landscape must be clarified in order to be able to seriously include the idea of God in a philosophical, ethical and/or theological frame of thought. A task of this thesis – in a wide sense – is therefore to articulate and discuss some of these conditions, which must be done before any return to their relevance for theological ethics and its central task.

One such condition concerns how to understand and think about language and truth in relation to experiences of living our lives in the contexts we do. A more specific formulation of the task at hand, is that in this thesis I discuss how to relate to certain moral concepts in a contemporary situation in which many interpretations of reality are deeply influenced by post-modern critical perspectives. In continuation of this, I can now approach an articulation of the main question of the thesis, which I refer to as “the problem of moral authority”. It will be developed in further detail in Chapter 2, but is in essence this: *How can we meaningfully understand and use words such as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ in relation to human life reality, after (or in, or from the perspective of) postmodernity?* This problem is to be examined by studying conditions for the potentially persuasive (authoritative) power of moral language. Another, more precise, way of phrasing this could be: what, in our (moral) constructions of language and reality, provides the power to convince and motivate us concerning what the good life is and how it is to be lived? In the wake of such a question, I can return to the earlier mentioned quest of the theologian, namely that which concerns theological interpretations of morality and moral concepts. How can these relate to conceptualizations of God and God’s will? This important question runs through the whole thesis, but will not be explicated in detail until a discussion in the (tentatively) concluding Part VI.

Before I turn to the problem in further depth, I shall first provide a background for posing questions such as the above. Their horizon primarily concerns what can be identified as a shift from a modern to a postmodern interpretation of reality, and the many theoretical challenges which, during the last decades, have in consequence been raised within academia. In the pre-

of thinking, a *critical perspective*. However, although ‘postmodernism’ is not a description of certain realities, it is possible to say that the thesis’s context is that of a “postmodern situation”, because of the common usage of the concept/idea. When I use this phrase, what I in fact mean is “a situation informed by postmodern criticism”.

sent discussion, the most relevant challenges concern issues of language, anthropology and subjectivity. The gradual development towards the present postmodern situation has been driven by a deep scepticism towards positivist enlightenment constructions of objective truth, power and rationality. The modern project has faltered as alternative perspectives to those representative of modernity have been provided by a diversity of contemporary thinkers. Flaws and deep problems in the world views, anthropologies and epistemologies of the modern project have been uncovered. This has consequently necessitated a rethinking of conditions for moral and ethical theory and language.

One such reason for rethinking is the deep dissatisfaction many philosophers and theologians have felt with the abstract nature of ethical theory and language which has been dominant in theoretical Western philosophy during the last centuries. This dissatisfaction serves as an important subtext for the work I do. One problem is that modern ethical theory has tended towards not providing adequate response and interpretative help to existential life experience. At the same time, the particular cultural contexts in which such experience takes place have not been given the necessary attention in modern constructions of theoretical ethics. Further: such abstract, formal approaches to ethics have not provided adequate help to handle a contemporary situation marked by diversity, plurality and disagreement. The modern response to such experiences has often been *either* to attempt constructions of universalist “God’s eye-view” models of ethics (counter to contextual sensitivity), *or* to lose all confidence in being able to say anything at all concerning morality in a pluralistic world (a nihilistic relativism).⁴ This description of the modern response to the current situation should be familiar. It is, however, with an awareness of postmodern critical perspectives on contemporary ethics that I attempt to discuss moral language and its persuasive potential. Responding to contextual experiences of plurality and issues of selfhood thus means not only *including* a context-sensitive perspective, but fundamentally understanding my theoretical position as embedded in particular and pluralistic traditions, albeit critically reflective in relation to them.

The many aspects of this critique of modern ethics apply not only to the (secular) context of moral philosophy, but obviously also to those of theological and Christian ethics.⁵ In addition

⁴ To the formulation of such a double failure, see for instance Stout, Jeffrey: *Ethics After Babel. The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*. Cambridge UK, 1988 (Paperback edition 1990), p.3.

⁵ I include the concept of ‘Christian ethics’ here, but must point out that this is a thesis in theological, not Christian ethics. I hold that the term ‘Christian ethics’ should be reserved for particular traditions, the communitarian ethics of denominations or Churches, while ‘theological ethics’ refers to a critical perspective informed by philosophical and theological tools for interpretation and reflection. This can

to the theoretical challenges above, a somewhat practical concern accentuates the relevance of the central question I have posed. For many people – both within and outside ecclesiastical communities – what goes as ‘Christian ethics’ often seems not only irrelevant to their lives and experiences, but also unconvincing, unhelpful in concrete situations, lacking in flesh and blood, and positively counter to what many people believe to be good and right. Much Christian ethics is and needs to be challenged by such a critique, and it is the task of theological ethics to articulate the challenge and possibly identify ways to move in other directions. Theoretical reflection loses something fundamental if experience and theory are not understood as being deeply intertwined.⁶ This is important to my understanding of the role of theology: a discipline that must stand in a critically reflective relation to the life of the church, the context in which theological ethics is fundamentally embedded.

The quest to identify the will of God for creation is a task which the theologian must therefore attend to in a way in which does not violate the boundaries for what human beings can interpret within given contexts. However, it is important to bear in mind that particular human experience cannot be given status as the full truth either.⁷ Human understanding and insight is always partial, and the theological quest can never pretend to offer final answers. Such humility concerning the task at hand must be upheld, although this does not mean that we shall cease seeking and articulating a new and ever more discerning and integrated understanding of what one reasonably (in the wide sense of reason) can hold to be true.

On this basis, the title of the thesis reflects an understanding of ethical theory as a reflective motion between different “moral voices” speaking their moral languages. Inherent in the formulation “ethical dialogue” is the conviction that although the moral and ethical task can never be completed, a truth-seeking dialogue can – and must – continuously be held.⁸

also be expressed in terms of the important distinction between the ‘first order language’ of faith on the one hand, and ‘second order language’ of theology on the other.

⁶ Experience is not to be understood here as ever being “raw” and unreflected, something to be supplemented by theoretical reflection. Experience is always – as I insist in the point I am making above – inherently part of theoretical reflection and vice versa.

⁷ This can be stated at deep level concerning theologically understood human identity (see for instance Henriksen, Jan Olav: *Imago Dei. Den teologiske konstruksjonen av menneskets identitet*. Oslo 2003, particularly p.354f.) It can also be understood in more cognitive terms. As I shall argue throughout the thesis, “truth” is always a relational construction which necessarily must transcend the individual as well as the human community.

⁸ The use of the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morals’ is intentionally rather ad hoc in the work I do. Having been theoretically “raised” with an understanding of morality as being the term used to speak about what we do, the actual *praxis*, whereas by ‘ethics’ one refers to the *theoretical* discussion of morality, it is difficult to leave this pattern of thought behind. Even the title reflects something of this distinction. How-

1.3. Towards New Horizons: Rethinking and Reconstructing Ethics

Having now introduced the task and its horizon at some different levels of significance, I shall give a sketch of my understanding of the branch of theory informed by postmodernity within which my argument belongs. The poet laureate T.S. Eliot wrote in 1940: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”⁹ This early quotation expresses rather crude, but I find illustrative, images of three key characteristic ideals of respectively modernism on the one hand, and two different conceptions of postmodern theory on the other. “Knowledge” represents ideals of modernity: objective, neutral, rational reflection. “Information” represents what can rudely be described as fragmented, unsubstantial and nihilistic self-destructing postmodern theory, while “wisdom” represents an ideal of critical and reconstructive attempts of thinking in a manner which transcends the limitations of rational knowledge while responding to an ethical ideal of *phronesis*.

As should be obvious from this value-loaded articulation of the three different sets of ideals, I subscribe to a mode of postmodern thought in which context-sensitive, pluralist quests for insight, integration and wisdom are seen as both ideals and possibilities. The quest is postmodern in the sense that deconstruction of modern rationalities, anthropologies and world views is fundamental. Thus my position represents a deeply critical stance with respect to the enlightenment project, but in an attitude of “reflected innocence”.¹⁰ The position differs from

ever, it is of fundamental importance that neither of them can be thought of in isolation from one another. They belong inherently together, and are often intertwined. This will necessarily be reflected in my text. Parallel to the relation between experience and theory in general, I hold that rather than distinguishing harshly between ‘ethics’ and ‘morals’, it is necessary to enhance the importance of thinking one in terms of the other. Further, central contributors to my work make use of different distinctions. While Iris Murdoch’s terminology is rather sloppy (she never clearly explicates her usage), Paul Ricoeur sees ‘ethics’ as a term for the way in which we articulate the aim of life, rooted in the contextual idea of the good life (Ricoeur, Paul: *Oneself as Another*, Chicago and London 1994, (1.edition: *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), translated by Kathleen Blamey), p.170-177). ‘Moral’ is to him equivalent to universal normativity, i.e. justice and laws. These have second priority – not in real life, but at a logical level. He sees morals as the “sieve” by which we designate the good, and by which to prevent arbitrary situationalism. This is similar to a German tradition as we see in for instance Habermas’ usage. (Henriksen, Jan-Olav: *Grobunn for moral. Om å være moralsk subjekt i en postmoderne kultur*. Kristiansand, 1997. pp.51-54) I shall return to Ricoeur’s position later, but I wish to make it clear that although I primarily use the traditional distinction between ethics and morals, Ricoeur’s usage hovers in the hinterland.

⁹ Eliot, T. S: “Two Choruses from ‘The Rock’” in: T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land and other Poems*. London 1990 (1st ed. 1940) p.77.

¹⁰ To this, see Kekes, John: *The Morality of Pluralism*, Princeton 1993 p.190-197. He tells a story about a child whose parents are actors. One night she wakes up because of a fight they are having. Her illusions of a happy family are shattered, and she sees herself and her parents in a new light. However, her parents were rehearsing for a play, and the fight was not their own. Still, the child’s loss of innocence could not be undone, and a new (healthy and necessary) reflectivity had been established.

most deconstructivist theories in that the scope for theoretical reflection is *expanded* in its search for wisdom in a wide sense, not *reduced* to a level of extreme scepticism and carefulness concerning what can be said about reality. In other words, the understanding of the theoretical field within which I see postmodern critical thought to be of instrumental value is a maximalist, not minimalist position. It is thus not the theory, or position itself which is postmodern. The label “postmodern”, rather, refers to the critical tools I use to approach an understanding of reality.

A presupposition for such a mode of thought is a conviction that both the fields of philosophy and theology need continuous rethinking and reconstruction in order to cope with the demands that the necessary and continuing deconstruction of central ideas of modernity have led to. For the purpose of such rethinking and reconstruction, many attempts have been made to find fresh approaches to theoretical reflection. Central to most of these has been the search for interaction between different fields of thought, fields which earlier have been held sharply distinct from one another. Such methodological and theoretical pluralism is important in this thesis, not only with regard to the concrete multidisciplinary nature of the work I do, but also as a fundamental conviction that to speak truthfully about reality, theory must respond to the fact that there are no hard boundaries between different aspects of life. Distinctions between disciplines (for instance between history and literature) can be helpful in order to make transparent an argument or insight, but they must not be seen as other than instrumental to a more wide reaching – albeit humble – quest for wisdom.

One such important cross-fertilizing contribution to theory informed by postmodern criticism, has come from the many who have sought a revival of aesthetic perspectives in philosophy and theology. For instance, many (including myself) have turned to the growing interdisciplinary field of ethics and literature.¹¹ Important here is that novels, drama, films and poetry are to their readers and audiences sources of joy, insight, challenge and development as human (moral) beings. Literary language and form differ from the more precise and stringent philosophical language and logic which the ethicist traditionally has considered hers (or in fact, usually *his*) to use.¹² With respect to the thesis’s title, the ongoing dialogues about “reality”

¹¹ A turn which includes a wide range of academic activities, and cannot be reduced to the work that narrative theorists (for instance narrative ethicists) do.

¹² This sweeping statement does fortunately not apply to all ethical traditions of modernity. I nevertheless think it is possible to say what I say, in particular with reference to the dominating influence of (logical) positivism on ethical discourse in the 20th Century.

within both literature and ethics are supplemented and challenged by the inclusion of a wider variety of voices, thus expanding the horizons in both arenas.

A further precondition for my turn to literature in ethics is a conviction that at a deep anthropological level, narrative form is relevant as a conceptual category by which to approach themes concerning selfhood and identity.¹³ Each person lives and interprets their life as narrative, at least to a certain extent.¹⁴ In fact, a life story can consist of many narratives, with *different* beginnings, middles and ends. Narrative theory therefore provides access to innovative and pluralist interpretations of the relationship between anthropology, ethics and moral language. Another necessary and important insight which arises from using narrative to interpret human (moral) life and identity is that no individual is isolated, but is inherently part of many other more or less meaningful stories, be it those of its relationships, its culture, history, religion or others. The historical context of experience is therefore always one of time and change, of people interacting, voices mingling and stories intertwining with each other. Any human experience will necessarily encounter, be challenged by and relativized by what is *other* to it – be it in interaction with other humans or animals, or ambiguity within one’s own life (for instance the distance between past and present self), or experiences of that which transcends the finiteness of humanity, such as God.¹⁵

With an inclusion of such aspects of literary and narrative theory, the scope for what moral philosophers and theological ethicists treat as their subject matter can now be seen as much broader, or *thicker*, than what used to be the case.¹⁶ The conviction that pluralistic and ambiguous human experience can be and is (at least to some degree) interpreted in terms of narrativity, literary form and language, and understanding humans as fundamentally relational

¹³ A typical formulation of narrative interpretation of selfhood is for instance Alasdair MacIntyre’s: “[A] concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.” MacIntyre, Alasdair: *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*. Great Britain 1994 (1st ed. 1981/85) p.205. I shall return to a critique of certain aspects of this understanding of narrative identity (Cf Part V, Chapters 13.4. and 13.6.), but for the time being I subscribe to MacIntyre’s view.

¹⁴ The point here is to state that narrative is a possible – and reasonable – approach to understanding human life and identity. It is not to discuss how to relate to discussions of possible psychological consequences of disrupted narratives, or to engage with the more traditional understanding of human life as instances of action “strung together” as single, identifiable points. More to this, see for instance Henriksen, Jan-Olav: *På grensen til Den andre. Om teologi og postmodernitet*. Oslo 1999, p.127.

¹⁵ To the last point: such experience will always be human experience of God, and thus *interpreted as* experience of the transcendent. See a discussion of religious experience and otherness in Gustafson, James: *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*. p.129-136.

¹⁶ To *thin* and *thick*; see for example Waltzer, Michael: *Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Aboard*. Notre Dame 1996, or, from a philosophical-linguistic rather than political point of view; Williams, Bernard: *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London 1985, p.129.

beings, paves the way for a non-static and relational way of understanding human life reality. The perspectives from literature and narratology can provide a basis for a dialectic and dynamic approach to ethics as academic discipline.¹⁷

My position, therefore, is to use insights from hermeneutic theories which have been developed in relation to such dialogic interpretations of reality. This hermeneutically informed attitude has been important with respect to my approach to both the general and theological discussions of moral language and agency. Thus having preliminarily argued the case for a hermeneutic, dialogic approach to ethical theory which includes narrative, relational anthropology and literary epistemology (I develop this further in Part II), I shall now outline some important characteristics of the arena of ethical discourse in which such perspectives have proved to be fruitful. In short, I show how dissatisfaction with certain approaches to moral language and anthropology has led to a necessary inclusion of contextual perspectives within ethical theory development.

A central theme in contemporary ethical dialogue is, and has been for some time, a discussion of the significance of words such as ‘right’ and ‘good’. This conversation is important to the one I pursue in this thesis, as to a certain extent it concerns the authority which such words are given in theoretical discourse. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor expresses the tendency in both modern theological and secular ethics to “see morality as concerned with questions of what we ought to do and to occlude or exclude questions about what it is good to be or what it is good to love.”¹⁸ Moral authority has thus been a question simply of formal jurisdiction, not taking into account the wider notion of embedded and integrated conviction. Taylor’s alternative strategy has therefore been to develop a theory that focuses precisely on what it is *good to be and love*. The implication is that knowledge of what it is *right to do* will follow from this, but cannot be the primary concern. His position thus represents a critique of the Cartesian and Kantian traditions of decontextualised rationality and individuality. Such an approach to ethical theory necessarily involves thematizing the relation between abstract theory and context, or praxis.¹⁹

¹⁷ A necessary comment to the term ‘dialectic’: I intentionally use this more or less as a synonym for ‘dialogic’. I am aware that they do give somewhat different connotations; ‘dialectic’ to Hegel et al and ‘dialogic’ to Bakhtin et al. However, they have the same root – and this thickness of many connotations is central to the hermeneutic approach I take in this thesis. See more to this in Part II, Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Taylor, Charles: “Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy” (p.3-28) in: Antonacchio, Maria and William Schweiker: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, Chicago 1996, p.3.

¹⁹ As we shall see, the turn to literature can be seen as one of several attempts to focus this complex relation. See also the earlier footnote to theory versus praxis (or experience).

Taylor's observation is typical of the motivation which lies behind a whole range of recently developed ethical theories and approaches to ethics, for instance narrative ethics. Virtue ethics, ethics of care, and other variants of communitarian, contextual and particularistic ethics are all cousins in this shift in focus from 'right' to 'good'. They have all evolved in a context of enlightenment critique and are thus perhaps informed by postmodern perspectives. However, in these traditions there is a renaissance of several pre-modern notions, for instance virtue, myth and allegory, the role of aesthetics in moral thought, and a return to less individualistic views of selfhood and humanity. As we already have seen, it is characteristic of these postmodern traditions that their anthropologies and theories of knowledge are seen as thicker than the thinness of those of modernity. Conceptions such as 'self' and 'truth' are not necessarily dismantled on the basis of, for instance, a sceptical attitude to "grand narratives" (as many post-structuralist theorists would argue), but with and awareness that the conditions for how to speak about such concepts must be critically examined. Following this, it means that the scope for what makes moral concepts intelligible becomes wider than that of traditional modern ethics.²⁰

This attention to a wider scope for ethical theory – which now has been introduced from several different perspectives – means that our moral languages must be re-examined. How can one relate to concepts such as 'good' or 'evil' in a cultural situation where *thin* objective meaning is met with deep distrust? This question represents somewhat hidden conflicts in the life of the moral subject in, or after postmodernity. I have introduced the necessity of approaching the problem from a context-sensitive theoretical perspective, and shall argue this case further: to be concerned with "questions about what it is good to be or what it is good to love" to repeat Taylor's phrasing, involves not simply focusing on 'good' as an abstract universal entity and seeking formal definitions of it, but in studying human life in context, be it through historical investigation (as for instance Alasdair MacIntyre has done), in focusing on

²⁰ There is, however, much to say for keeping some form of borderline between what is considered to be moral language and not. What is relevant to the dialogue must be a question for continuous scrutiny. A scope too wide does not make a moral concept more intelligible. See a further discussion of an extension in understanding moral discourse in Stout: *Ethics After Babel*, p.70, where he points out that "a broader conception is richer only if it allows us to tell better stories of how we got to be where we are, to engage in more fruitful dialogue with other cultures, and to make sense of all extant moral languages as members of a single family connected by intelligible relations of family resemblance."

particular practices or communities (Stanley Hauerwas's project) or in studying ethical aspects of and in literature²¹ (as attempted by Martha Nussbaum).

Bringing contextual sensitivity to ethics by focusing on narrative and literature, has proved productive of new and creative possibilities in thinking about and communicating moral issues during the last decades. However, such a wider horizon for reflection on questions concerning how to live one's good life also paves the way for many challenges and as yet unsolved problems. Although I agree that 'good' and 'evil' cannot primarily be studied as abstract, universal entities, my approach differs from the attempts of MacIntyre, Hauerwas and (to a lesser extent) Nussbaum, in that I am not convinced that language, narrative nor morality can be understood from context, tradition or praxis alone. We are, as situated, individual users of language, embedded in context and cannot utterly transcend this. However, there are elements of language which must be to some extent interpersonal, or shared, or containing some degree of objectivity, in order to make communication possible. The question is "where", with respect to the moral agent, these elements belong. A hope for this study is that it will provide some access to understanding the authoritative potential of moral language in post-modernity by examining particular concepts as developing in a constant dialogic oscillation between their (primary) thick contextual, substantial meaning on the one hand, and their (secondary) thinner formal universal definitions on the other. The turn to literature is instrumental to this.

The horizon presented here has been wide, pointing to a diversity of issues such as linguistics, epistemology, narrative theory, moral psychology, theology, moral philosophy and literary criticism. The concrete approach I have chosen in order to discuss the problem in the thesis as a whole does, however, provide a narrower focus. I shall argue my case for a dynamic view on moral authority primarily through a study of one particular literary text, by examining certain characters in a novel by the British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch (1919—1999) titled *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.²² These characters are representations of 'good' and 'evil' as are Frodo and Sauron, but the portrayals are ambivalent and challenging with respect to the insight they provide concerning moral life, language and agency. There are, however, several

²¹ The distinction between "ethical aspects *of* literature" and "ethical aspects *in* literature" reflects a double interest in the relation between ethics and literature. The first refers includes, for instance, the training of the moral subject's imagination. The second can involve studying particular moral problems or characters.

²² Murdoch, Iris: *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, London 1972 (1st ed. 1970).

necessary paths to be trodden before I can concentrate on this analysis. First I shall turn to a more in depth discussion of what the problem at hand actually involves.

2. The Problem of Moral Authority in Profile

2.1. Preliminary Considerations on 'Authority'

a) Deconstruction and Re-interpretation: The Purpose of the Chapter

In the present chapter, I shall concentrate on the concept of 'authority', aiming to clarify some important distinctions concerning different ways in which it can be understood and used. What is at stake here is to pave the way for the formulation of the operative questions in Chapter 2.2. that I shall discuss in the remainder of the thesis. I present some of the historical conditions for its usage with the intention of re-interpreting the concept in order for it to be instrumental in a contemporary context. As I shall argue over the coming pages, I hold that as language and reality are deeply intertwined, it is an important task to carefully consider the words we use in order to uncover the hidden realities they bring with them, and in continuation of this, to reflect on the possibility of new realities filling the words with appropriate meaning. Such reflection might lead to the conclusion that some words are best left to die. They have served their purpose, and we no longer need them. This is an important aspect of language as being historically dynamic. For many, the word 'authority' is one of these words. In much contemporary society, it often gives negative associations. It is easily connected to ideas of subordination, lack of freedom and/or autonomy, and hierarchical power-structures more or less backed by sanctions. Likewise, following a philosophical-political route from Kant via Sartre to, for example, Aung San Suu Kyi, the word 'anti-authoritarian' has a positive ring to it. It sounds egalitarian, respectful and empowering with regard to the individual. I myself have had such associations, and still carry them with me.

However, I think that the word 'authority' might after all prove useful and constructive in postmodern language and in relation to this, ethical theory. My intentions with this chapter are as follows: first, by a deconstruction of the concept and its usage in some different historical contexts, I can show why many contemporaries have such negative associations to it.²³ Sec-

²³ 'Deconstruction' is probably a slightly massive word to designate what I actually do, which is a very modest attempt at showing a variety of, albeit rather hidden, understandings of the concept of 'authority'.

only, having stripped the concept of some of its given and unchallenged meanings that we easily carry with us, I can tentatively reconstruct the concept. This is important for the continuation of the present study, as I will use the revitalized concept to bring to light some aspects of the literary texts (and the following discussion of them) that might not otherwise have been easy to identify.

In short, this deconstruction and reconstruction involves first of all “a linguistic turn” – a move away from the political arena in which the concept ‘authority’ is often used. I then study the difference between a formal and substantial approach to what we hold to be “morally authoritative”, and argue that a historical-contextual rather than a universalist approach to moral language can provide moral concepts such as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ with an authoritative potential. Finally, a deconstruction of the connection between power and authority will give access to a discussion on ‘authority’ as a link between what we hold to be true and what persuades and motivates our actions. Such authority, I argue, is internal to the moral agent, but, as we shall see, it is inherently dependent on a dialogic attitude in which the (external) perspective of the *other* is perpetually integrated.

On the basis of the above, then, the working definition of ‘moral authority’ in the thesis is twofold. By ‘moral authority’ I mean: 1) *The substantial content of a moral concept which on a wide basis can convincingly seen to be true, and 2) which motivates and empowers the moral agent to act in accordance with it.* It is important that I do not see this as a formal definition, but one which is based on the usage I hold to be possible after the forthcoming discussion of ‘authority’. I shall now argue my case, beginning in an etymological and historical presentation.

b) Etymology, Definitions and Usage

The word ‘authority’ comes from the Latin ‘*auctoritas*’, which means ‘power’, ‘support’ or ‘lead’. This is further derived from ‘*auctor*’, meaning ‘author’ or ‘originator’.²⁴ The etymological background indicates that authority is a social concept in the sense that it refers to individuals interacting. The etymology also more or less presupposes a hierarchical structure of

²⁴ The definitions are from the Latin/English dictionary: (<http://catholic.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookup.pl?stem=auctor&ending, 03.06.2004>). In full: “**Auctor** -oris (m.) “[one who gives increase]. Hence (1) [an originator , causer, doer; founder of a family; architect of a building; author of a book; originator of or leader in an enterprise; source of or warrant for a piece of information]. (2) [a backer, supporter, approver, surety].” And: “**Auctoritas** -atis f. (1) [support , backing, lead, warrant]; polit., [sanction] (esp. of the senate). (2) [power conferred, rights, command]; legal, [title]. (3) in gen., [influence, authority, prestige]; meton., [an influential person].”

organization. In this hierarchy, authority is *externally* provided to the subordinate individual, who in consequence of the authority-relation acts differently from what he or she otherwise would have done. External authority in this sense is understood as given, and justified “in itself”. If it is challenged, it loses its authoritative status.

Historically, such externally provided authority has had different sources. For Plato, persons of authority had to be capable of leading society towards the eternal, unchanging unity and reality of good, *good* being the ultimate source of authority.²⁵ Aristotle argues that authority is a natural talent, some have it in them as a given factor.²⁶ *Nature* thus represents the external source of authority, a tradition which has been extended in the idea of Natural Law. For the Romans, what had been established in the past, in other words, *tradition*, provided the foundation of authority.²⁷ In the Christian tradition, *God* has also had such a position as external authority – particularly with respect to moral law. Understandings of ‘authority’ such as these usually involve taking the source for granted.

‘Authority’ as a concept has deep and somewhat diverse historical roots. Much of its meaning has been negatively defined throughout modernity. It was central to the Enlightenment project to reject “given” external authorities such as the above, and to replace them with rationality and critically reflected autonomous “certainty”.²⁸ However, this is complicated by the modern notion that if something is rationally justified, it is to be held as universally authoritative – for instance the declaration of Human Rights. Thus, ‘authority’ is difficult to define as a general idea, because its various definitions are all somewhat internal to the context in which it is used.

At this stage it can, therefore, be helpful to see in which situations the concept of ‘authority’ is operationalized in contemporary language, society and theory – in addition to those mentioned above. As far as I can see, there are three arenas in which it gets most attention. The

²⁵ “(...) if it is unknown in what way just things and beautiful things are good, these things will not have gained a guardian of themselves worth much, in one who does not know this in himself”. Plato: “The Republic”(Book VI) in: *Great Dialogues of Plato*, New York 1956 (translated by W.H.D. Rouse), p.304.

²⁶ “For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master.” Aristotle: *The Politics*, Book I, (<http://www.swan.ac.uk/poli/texts/aristotle/aripola.htm>, 11.09.2004).

²⁷ Arendt, Hannah: “What is Authority” in: Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future*. New York 1977, p.120.

²⁸ Both Hannah Arendt and Jeffrey Stout argue in this direction; that the modern situation and thought is characterized by what they saw as a “crisis of authority”. (Stout, Jeffrey: *The Flight from Authority. Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy*. Notre Dame 1981, p.2). While Stout studies this situation critically, Arendt adheres to it herself: “...authority has vanished from the modern world”. (Arendt, Hannah: “What is Authority”, p.91.)

first is in political contexts and their corresponding political or social theories. Most dictionary definitions and encyclopaedias take their starting point from this kind of usage. ‘Authority’ is then seen in relation to questions of power, jurisdiction, government, hierarchy, obedience, legitimacy and so forth. The second arena is where the concept of ‘authority’ refers to expertise or wisdom, usually related to a person (or persons) with special insight in a given field. The third arena is in the realm of morality, where different structures of certain values, norms or actions are justified.

Although this last usage is probably not quite as widespread as the two others, this is the arena in which I primarily use the word – both in continuation with and in opposition to tradition. The three arenas intersect, and it is obviously not possible to distinguish absolutely between them. But while the first two largely concern actual social relationships – for instance between rulers and the ruled, or between teacher and student, parent and child, the third also has the potential of a more subjective, or internal, aspect to it. The Kantian (and modern) notion of autonomy is an example of a non-political conception of authority, in the sense that the rational individual is understood as its own (formal) authority in terms of justification of norms and action. The Freudian superego can also be seen as a representative image of constructions of such an internal (or non-political) understanding of moral authority, where the internalized father-figure is the author of morality – and its judge.

However, although I study ‘moral authority’ as an aspect of the individual moral agent’s *internal* language and action, the anthropological position on which this study is based is not individualistic, but fundamentally relational. This is an important difference, and is an essential aspect of my approach. Being, meaning and action – which all come together in language – can never be understood as belonging to the individual alone. We (as humans and users of language) are situated in contexts in which meaning is developed in relationships, in communities and traditions. This doubleness of being, meaning and language, their simultaneous internality and externality, or in other words, subjectivity and objectivity, is an important aspect of the argument I develop with regard to ‘the problem of moral authority’.

I shall now follow two axes inherent in the problem, which correspond somewhat (but not quite) to the arenas of the actual usage of the word ‘authority’ mentioned above. It is by pursuing these that I shall perform the task of mild deconstruction and cautious reconstruction of the concept at hand. In the two forthcoming sub-chapters, I shall therefore discuss further some important aspects of authority with regard to the two axes of power and language.

c) Power and Authority

‘Power’ is a concept traditionally deeply intertwined with authority, in both moral and political theory (in the latter more explicitly than in the first). Although in this thesis I am more concerned with moral language than political theory, the issue of power nevertheless needs to be addressed, as it has such strong connotative connections with authority. The aim here is first and foremost to clarify my understanding of and use of the terminology – and how I do *not* use it. However, there is not only terminological, but also substantial profit from a discussion of power and authority.

As already indicated, it is primarily in a socio-political context that the power-issue is strongly connected to authority. The Oxford English Dictionary initially defines ‘authority’ as “power or right to enforce obedience.”²⁹ According to this, an authoritative relation exists when the legitimacy of power is invested in someone as opposed to someone else. The interaction of ideas of authority, power and community raises several important problems. I shall at this point bring some perspectives from four different thinkers into the dialogue: the German philosophers Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas and the Frenchman Michel Foucault, who have all provided contributions to such discussions. I do not enter into a deep analysis or close readings of any of these, but use some of their ideas to develop and argue my case for an internally dynamic understanding of moral authority and moral language.³⁰

I shall start with a (terminological) problem, which concerns whether it is possible to see authority and *persuasion* as part of the same structure, as I have done until now.³¹ Arendt argues that they cannot be seen as such, because authority always presupposes a hierarchical structure. In a relation of equality, it is rational debate, not authority-relations, that serves as the argumentative background for persuasion. Says Arendt: “Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order

²⁹ *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford 1984. In extension of this definition, it would be natural to discuss the relation between authority, power and *violence*. This is a theme which often occurs in political discourse on authority (for instance in Arendt), but although it is interesting and important, it does not have particular relevance to the present discussion.

³⁰ The use of Arendt and Gadamer is based on my own readings of two relatively short articles that both specifically address the problem of authority. My arguments based on perspectives from Foucault and Habermas are mostly from secondary sources, in particular Henriksen, Jan-Olav: *Grobunn for Moral*. Chapters 2 (on Habermas, p.33-107) and 5 (on Foucault, p.145-187).

³¹ See for instance already on the second page of my Part I, Chapter 1, where ‘the problem of moral authority’ is first introduced.

which is always hierarchical.”³² A different view is proposed by Gadamer, who distinguishes between the use of the words ‘authoritarian’ and ‘authoritative’.³³ He argues that when someone who has the role of being authoritative (in the sense of being able to persuade others) attempts to force or demonstrate this position, he or she becomes authoritarian. The equality which makes authoritative persuasion possible is thereby shifted, and the power structure becomes hierarchical and authoritarian. I understand Gadamer as arguing in the same direction as Arendt, in the sense that he too wishes to distinguish between situations of hierarchy and equality. However, by drawing the distinction between the two grammatical forms of the same root, he addresses the different structures of power – a hierarchical situation on the one hand, and on the other, one where a relation of equality can be seen to exist – while all the time retaining the singular concept of authority, albeit in a more ambiguous form than Arendt’s.

Is, then, a hierarchical power-structure necessarily inherent in the concept of authority? I do not believe it is, although for many it would seem that the two are too deeply intertwined work separately from each other. It might be necessary to retain this connection when speaking in or about certain political contexts. An accurate political discourse might have to respond to the reality of hierarchical structures in a given society. In a moral context too, there can be aspects of hierarchy connected to the concept of authority, which must be identified as such in an accurate analysis. However, against a one-dimensional understanding of the concept, I wish to follow Gadamer and not Arendt in retaining the (ambiguous) concept of authority as part of the same structure as persuasion, which does not necessarily imply hierarchy. This, however, needs to be developed further, and leads to the issue of power in the context of the relation between language and reality.

If language is inherently connected to interpretations of reality, which I believe it is and shall discuss further when following the second axis, it is important to take into consideration what happens to (moral) language when such interpretations and conceptualizations of reality *change* – as they have done in the wake of enlightenment critique. This can be visualized using two different images of (social) reality. A dominant modern metaphor for social reality has been the *pyramid*. For example, Arendt almost takes this for granted, and her understanding of the meaning of ‘authority’ in government corresponds closely to this.³⁴ A more com-

³² Arendt, Hannah: “What is Authority?”, p.93.

³³ Gadamer, Hans-Georg: *Den gåtfulla hälsan: essäer och föredrag*, Ludvika 2003, p.123f.

³⁴ Arendt, Hannah: “What is Authority?”, p.98 and p.124.

mon image of social relations for those who interpret reality from a postmodern perspective, however, is a *net*, or a *web*.³⁵ This much used metaphor corresponds to a shift in the way power-structures are seen to be inherent in human relations, and by extension, moral language. An important aspect of postmodern thought concerns deconstructing and rethinking the givenness of traditional hierarchical structures – including those of language. A postmodern thinker such as Foucault argues for an understanding of power (as well as the moral subject) as de-centred.³⁶ As Foucault more than any has taught us, however, structures of power are often invisible to us. They must be “excavated” in order to be dismantled. Imagining that a power-free discourse can exist, is to obscure the actual situation and give a misuse of power free rein. Foucault points out that “power circulates: It is never monopolized by one centre. It is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization.”³⁷ Such a view does not disqualify the problematic of actually managing to identify such power, but it is counter to a “given” understanding of human relations as *static* hierarchies.

On this basis, I hold that authority can and ought to be interpreted differently in a postmodern situation than within a modern context. My suggestion is to rethink the concept of authority in relation to a network-image of power, and leave the pyramid behind. This can be done, for instance, by excavating the structures of power inherent in much modern moral philosophical “objective” theory and language – in which abstract, rational and formal definitions and theories are often imagined as “high up” in a hierarchy. The messiness of historical real life floats at the bottom of the pyramid, so to speak, and must be transcended in order to provide authoritative reasons to act. This is important to my attempt to rethink the authoritative-persuasive potential of moral concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in a dialogic “mode” of thinking. If the reality of human social interaction is interpreted in terms of dialogic, not primarily hierarchical images, this does not discredit the possibility of the existence of power structures. More important, though, is that a dialogic approach represents a vision of human communities as consisting of a dynamic of different perspectives in constant interaction, in which both static hierarchy (pyramidal power relations), other forms of non-equality (power

³⁵ An expression of this, is, of course, the internet. This holds both with regard to the reality of a form of structuring human relations which is new, and hypertext as symbol of a rationality which differs from more traditional, linear, thought.

³⁶ I am aware that this presentation of Foucault’s perspectives represent a caricature of his position. However, the history of reception represents an awareness of the necessity of destabilizing traditional views on power. I do not follow Foucault very far in his project, but his points of view provide some very important critique of modern thinking which cannot be ignored.

³⁷ The point is from (<http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/crit.97/Foucault/Foucault.htm>, 05.06.2004)

relations of a web-like structure) and equality all are part of the picture. The point is that they must not be taken for granted, but must be discerningly evaluated and made transparent.

Turning from Foucault's view of discourse, I approach the matter of moral authority as the provider of the individual's moral language (and what it represents) with persuasive power to act, by looking at the work of Habermas – a philosopher who cannot exactly be said to be postmodern, and who strongly criticises Foucault's project. In particular, Habermas disagrees with Foucault and other postmodern critics of power that symmetrical (or equal) dialogue is impossible. He distinguishes between strategic (asymmetrical) action and communicative (symmetrical) action. Again we see the doubleness of hierarchy and equality that we saw that both Arendt and Gadamer identify as a problematic concerning understanding of the concept of 'authority'. Habermas holds that it is possible to establish procedures for communication which can help the partners in dialogue to understand each other.³⁸ Inherent in this, is to clarify as far as possible the conditions for the "ideal speech-situation" in which power-relations are identified in order for them to be "neutralised". I do not follow Habermas all the way in what I think is a too rationalistic and idealistic project, but I do think that many of his insights are valid. For instance, as the Norwegian theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen underlines in his analysis of Habermas, the danger of a universal, rational morality is that it loses its motivational power.³⁹ The authoritative status of (decontextualised) moral norms thus must stand in relation to the life world, although not all immediately encountered life forms can be seen as universally valid. This demands a reflective attitude as to which norms can be held as valid. Habermas holds that this reflective task must be performed by the moral subject him- or herself.

What is of primary importance here with respect to my theme of authority as persuasion is that the reflective competence that Habermas holds to be necessary is part of the picture (although I find him too optimistic with respect to the individual agent's capacity in this respect). My task is to study forms of interaction between internal (substantial, particular) and external (formal, universal) aspects of authoritative moral language, and the competence of the moral subject/agent is inherent in this. However, as I shall argue later, I find that hermeneutic (Ricoeurian) and dialogic (Bakhtinian) perspectives help me more than the discourse ethics of Habermas. This is because I find that the theoretical perspectives they provide are more in tune with what I have argued earlier, that the embeddedness of the subject cannot be

³⁸ Henriksen: *Grobunn for Moral*, p.34.

³⁹ Same book, p.68.

transcended. The dialogic-hermeneutic reflexivity is therefore more helpful than the set of formal procedures Habermas proposes – which presupposes a form of objective rational mind able to transcend the life world to a certain extent.

To conclude this discussion of power and authority: in order to develop our competence as language users in a different situation from that in which a concept has been developed, we must speak about conditions for how to understand both the situation and the conditions for how to proceed in our use of language.⁴⁰ The language-using community no longer necessarily has to be understood only in political-hierarchical terms, but can be seen as a dynamic relation of different language users, in which different structures of power must be identified. In this sense, the authority of moral language (that which persuades us of the substantial content of a moral concept such as ‘good’ or ‘evil’) is something which is integral and internal to the individual agent, but deeply dependent on his or her relation to what is other.

d) Moral Language and Authority

The second axis concerns (moral) language, ‘truth’ and conviction. The concept of ‘authority’ has not traditionally had much place here. However, as I have argued in the section on authority and power, the contemporary discussion on the destabilization of power-structures leads to issues of communication – in other words, language. One point of interconnection between the two axes of language and power is where moral authority in a sense becomes a question of “who” has the power to decide the meaning of language. Caricatured, the question is whether it is the moral philosophers, linguists and theological ethicists who are “empowered” to rationally decide and define what ‘good’ and ‘evil’ mean (providing formal, external authority), or if it is rather ordinary language users, or maybe literary writers who have such epistemological power (as providers of substantial, internal authority). A further point of interaction becomes the link between language and agency: what, in continuation of the complex of moral language, truth and authority, provides the *power to act*? I shall later use the concept of ‘character’ both as an ethical and a literary construction to illustrate and develop external and internal aspects of a linguistic understanding of moral authority, and to show how both aspects are part of a whole that provides motivation and empowerment with regard to action. I do not, however, focus specifically on this for quite some time.⁴¹

⁴⁰ I do not in this thesis adhere strongly to Habermas’s deontological and procedural discourse ethics, but there are nevertheless important insights to be gained from his thorough and interesting attempt to transcend singular “life worlds” as well as fundamentally rooting universalism in concrete life.

⁴¹ This is the central theme in my Part V: “Dialogues on Character and Moral Authority”.

I enter a discourse on (moral) language which traditionally has had a somewhat dichotomised structure, similar to that mentioned above. On the one hand, there is a view that (moral) language should be understood as objective in the sense in which the meaning of concepts can be formally and universally defined, and on the other, the opposing view that (moral) language and meaning is to be understood as relative, – as contextual construction.⁴² These two positions represent a formalist versus a relativist approach to understanding language, and involve quite different attitudes as to “where” the primary authority underlying a moral concept is seen to belong – and what provides the moral subject with the “power to act” in accordance with what he or she holds to be true. I ask whether such a stark dualism is necessary.⁴³ I shall pursue certain aspects of this axis primarily with the help of views on language and (moral) authority in the works of the North American philosopher Jeffrey Stout.

In order to grasp why Jeffrey Stout’s position is relevant to the present discussion of moral authority in a postmodern situation, I shall outline how he develops his views on moral language from a beginning in *The Flight from Authority* to a thick theory of language, interaction and meaning in *Ethics After Babel*. As a starting point, Stout argues that Descartes’ quest for certainty was “born (...) in a flight from authority”⁴⁴. His was a project to develop ‘knowledge’ established by sceptical rationality⁴⁵ in opposition to the ‘probability’ of foundational truths which were “approved by authority”.⁴⁶ The complex of history and the authority of tradition was treated with suspicion from Descartes onwards, and has led to a situation in which philosophy and theology might seem to have become irrelevant. This must be seen in connection with Stout’s view that the attempt to establish philosophical truth as being autonomous from history has failed. His project in *The Flight from Authority*, is to counter this with a historicist position, but of a kind which differs from traditional historism – where history *itself* served as authority with regard to truth and justification. His point is to interpret concepts such as “meaning” and “truth” as part of ever changing “conceptual schemes”. Therefore,

⁴² This distinction disregards whether or not one holds a realist or non-realist position. It is closer to a Saussurean distinction between ‘langue’ and ‘parole’. None of these positions are necessarily dependent on the problem of whether there exists a given reality to which language refers.

⁴³ A formalist understanding of language is somewhat obsolete in our day and age, but many of the unsolved problems concerning authority ethical theory can be traced back to unreflected conceptions of language as given (although an awareness of the contextual nature of language has penetrated most simplistic understandings of this). Pragmatic approaches are more sophisticated in this respect, and it is within such discourse I find helpful perspectives with respect to the problem of moral authority and language.

⁴⁴ Stout, Jeffrey: *The Flight from Authority*, p.67.

⁴⁵ Same book, p.6.

⁴⁶ Same book, p.9.

Stout sees his work as “conceptual archaeology”.⁴⁷ He holds this to be the logical successor of analytic philosophy, which has been decontextualised to the extent that meaning has been emptied from moral language. For the “conceptual archaeology” to be something other than the abstract conceptual analysis of analytic philosophy, he turns to what he calls ‘holism’. This brings us back to the issue of language, and specifically, language *in* history. By ‘holism’, Stout means that “language cannot be divided up in the way envisioned by proponents of the distinctions between the analytic and the synthetic, theory and observation, or fact and value”⁴⁸ He argues in the pragmatic tradition, that *usage* of language in context, not meaning *as such*, is what must be studied. In this sense, ‘meaning’ becomes a wider term, and can be understood as “a pattern of intersections in the web of belief”⁴⁹. Further, such meaning is not accessible other than by a historicism of the kind he proposes. Says Stout:

To assess a sentence’s credibility, one must be able to interpret it. To interpret a sentence, one must establish its relation to a context of generally accepted and deeply entrenched sentences in the same domain. This means that both radical scepticism and foundationalist epistemology, at least in their traditional forms, share a mistaken assumption if holism is correct.⁵⁰

Stout uses pragmatic linguistic theory in order to distance himself from two different positions concerning certainty and justification of truth, respectively *foundationalism* and *radical relativism*. (This corresponds to the position I have sought, and Stout belongs in the context of a postmodern critique of the quest for epistemological foundations, but without being “self-destructive” as radical relativist positions are.⁵¹) I shall not give an account here of his whole argument throughout the book, but bring this fundamental aspect of his quest to a discussion of what he continues to do in *Ethics After Babel*. Here, Stout develops his understanding of morality by studying language both as metaphor and the fundamental reality in which we are embedded. He writes the following about moral languages:

Moral languages, our own included, are not static systems. We need a kinematics to understand their changing presuppositions, and evolutionary history to understand how old concepts, originally at home in one environment, might find their niche in a new one, combining with others in unanticipated ways to form a viable linguistic ecosystem.⁵²

⁴⁷ Same book, p.15.

⁴⁸ Same book, p.19.

⁴⁹ Same book, p.19.

⁵⁰ Same book, p.20.

⁵¹ Same book, p.12.

⁵² Stout, Jeffrey: *Ethics After Babel*, p.219.

In the forthcoming thematic analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* of Part V, I shall use insights from the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913 -) and the Russian literary theorist Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) as keys to understanding the dynamic development (“kinematics”) of moral language within the novel. The novel-characters who represent ‘good’ and ‘evil’ will be studied in the light of a dialectic of their being representations of moral presuppositions on the one hand, and their embeddedness in narrative on the other (a distinction between character as “type” versus “individual”, which I shall develop later). By studying the characters as symbolic representatives of moral language and aspects of this, I gain access to the “linguistic ecosystem” of the novel and can thus evaluate it as such. Thus, Stout’s view on moral language provides a useful insight to this analysis.

Until now, I have mostly spoken of moral language in the singular, although I have referred to the plurality of moral voices in the title and in an earlier comment on it. In the quotation above, Stout shows how the *diversity* of moral languages represents a core image of what pluralism involves, and of communication about morality in such a situation – and what needs to be done in order to handle such a changing diversity. In order to develop further his theory of communication – a form of pragmatic linguistics, he introduces three different models by which attempts at understanding interaction between moral languages can be visualised. The three images are based on those linguistically defined forms of moral language that have developed from interaction between persons of different mother/moral tongues:

Moral Esperanto: What optimistic modernism strives for in ethics; an artificial moral language invented in the (unrealistic) hope that everyone will want to speak it.

Moral pidgin: Any simplified moral language developed as a bridge dialect to facilitate communication among communities otherwise unconnected by a common moral tongue.

Moral creole: A moral language that starts as a pidgin but eventually gets rich enough for use as a language of moral reflection (e.g. the language of human rights).⁵³

Here, language is a metaphor for different approaches to ethical theory. As far as I can see, an important aspect of Stout’s project in *Ethics after Babel*, is to see language as the ultimate symbol of embeddedness in one or several particular situations. The misguided attempt of ethicists to create rational “thin” theories with universalist ambitions corresponds to the image of “Moral Esperanto” – an artificial and lifeless language in which no-one is interested, serves badly as a means of communication in a multi-linguistic, or pluralist, situation.

⁵³ Stout, Jeffrey: *Ethics After Babel*, p.294.

My main intention in bringing Stout into the development of the problem in the context of language and authority is to argue first, that language and reality are inherently intertwined. To discuss conditions for moral authority and agency, therefore, means to discuss moral language as it is used in historical context. All experiences, including those of selfhood and otherness, are interpreted, articulated and communicated with the help of language. Stout points out that “the moral language we use in daily life has much to do with what that life is like, with what we are like.”⁵⁴ In continuation of Stout, I would hold that if “what we are like” is fundamentally dependent on the relationship between self and other, moral language too must be understood as a deeply relational construction. The authoritative potential of moral language can and should therefore also be understood in relational, non-static terms. Thus, our understanding of moral concepts like ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is partially constructed by our various experiences of good and evil in the lives that we live. However, the meaning of moral concepts is not given simply by this. Their meaning is always unfinalized in the context of moral life.

Thus, and this is the second point I draw from Stout, we must find viable alternative strategies for communication between moral languages *within* (unfinalized) history, not from an impossible a-historical vantage point. Moral languages (and moral insights) develop and become convincing and communicable through our interaction with what is *other* to our own experience. Such ‘other’ is, however, never a-historical. There is thus a continuous dialectic movement between the multitude of perspectives which all the different moral voices and languages represent. In Stout’s terminology, the goal is to move on from “Moral pidgin”, to develop “Moral creole” and certainly, to avoid “Moral Esperanto”. By entering into dialogue, doing our best to translate and communicate, moral languages expressed by individual voices are and must be constantly challenged, criticised and developed.

Finally, to conclude and move on: Stout expresses very well some fundamental aspects of my own quest towards studying moral language in context, as a dialogue between different voices. Importantly too, the textual extract shows how language and theory are intertwined.

If moral philosophy is reflection on the language of morals, it can claim no uniform and unchanging subject matter. The next culture heard from or the latest wrinkle in our own form of life can yield new candidates for truth and falsehood, ways of living in the world which we haven’t anticipated, and quite possibly new kinds of people for us to be. That is why each generation needs to write its own moral philosophy. Until some version of moral Esperanto triumphs and the anthropologists, historians, and novelists

⁵⁴ Same book, p.71.

die out, there is no way of telling what fresh tasks will be placed before us. Moral philosophy is not practiced from the vantage point of omniscience, above history. (...) It matters then, where moral philosophy begins.⁵⁵

In this thesis, *I begin* my philosophical reflection in a close study of how moral concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are present and developed in the form and content of a particular novel (although I do prepare this entry somewhat extensively!). This is a contextually based attempt to understand how aspects of dialogue can handle fundamental difference and change. Through this, I hope to develop some sort of platform by which to be able to speak of a moral concept’s thickness of meaning, and following this, also to speak about the possibility of the moral subject’s empowerment and motivation to live by her or his conviction.

e) From Formal to Substantial Authority

So far, what I have developed is a problem field which concerns questions of authority primarily in relation to moral language. I have also discussed the necessity of an awareness of power issues inherent in language and dialogic relations. My aim has been to show that moral concepts can no longer be given authority (or persuasive value) insofar as they are understood as objectively referential and meaningful *in themselves*. They can only be understood, constructed and held to be true in the sense that they correspond to an understanding of values, morality and ethics as being inherently *part of* the context of human relationships. However, interpretation of contextual experience is never finalized and one’s own experience cannot be understood in isolation. Therefore, understanding of moral language and its authoritative potential needs constant re-evaluation as new insights are posited as *other* to the first, thus necessitating dialogue between the juxtaposing views. This study represents such an attempt to re-evaluate some particular instances of potentially authoritative moral language, by examining literary explorations of the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

The problem of moral authority is, however, not only one of moral language. It also involves an awareness of the intersection between linguistics and moral agency. What power, or authority, do words, or concepts, such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ have concerning our attempts to live good lives in a moral sense? In short, I study the possibilities for a shift from understanding moral authority as a formal, hierarchical and political category, towards a more substantial and internal (but relational) understanding of authority, which pays respect to context, history and the situated moral agent. Later, I shall show how literary analysis and discussions of

⁵⁵ Same book, p.72.

character can provide a deeper understanding of what such a shift involves. To anticipate the conclusion of Part V: I develop the argument that moral language is individually authoritative in as much as its “truth”, or meaning, is integrated in a person’s life story and his or her reflective relation to this narrative. To a certain extent, it is in such integration between conviction and action that authority is “tested”.

In the following passage, I shall bring this discussion of authority into an articulation of precise formulations of the operative questions around which I revolve, in order to enable a fruitful discussion of the rather wide problem field in relation to the actual texts I will be studying.

2.2. The Operative Questions

I have now arrived at a stage where several aspects of the main operative question in its wide, now familiar double meaning have been discussed: *What makes us convinced as to what is truly good and evil, and what gives us the motivation to live (act) in accordance to such conviction?* This concerns the problem of authority on the one hand as a linguistic problem informed by issues of power, and on the other a question of moral agency. I have shown how it is an aim to develop further a conception of moral authority which loosens absolute understandings of authority as belonging to strict hierarchical structures, where formal objective external definitions of moral language and agency (the two come together in rules, and “oughts”) serve as *de jure* guides to action. This involves a turn to context and pragmatic, dialogic understandings of language, agency and *de facto*, substantial authority.

Further, I have argued that the contextual place for my analysis is in literature. I shall later discuss the relation between reality and literature – a discussion which is important, as I have so far presupposed that literature is parallel to the context of human life reality. A practical, wide question with reference to the above is nevertheless possible at this stage: *How can one by help of literary analysis gain a deeper understanding of moral language and agency as substantially authoritative?* I will attempt to answer this question by showing a way in which I believe it can be done, and during this “doing”, to provide theoretical reflection over conditions for such a process.

In these literary and ethical discussions, I wish to avoid what is arguably a double pitfall of ‘external-objective foundationalism’ on one hand (where the meanings of moral concepts are given) and ‘quasi-tolerant relativity’ on the other (where ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are arbitrary con-

structions).⁵⁶ Concretely, therefore, I approach this aspect of the problem by turning to the doubleness inherent in the literary categories of *form* versus *content*, with particular reference to their interaction within the conception of literary character. I shall study central characters in Iris Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* through a dual perspective, namely by reading them as simultaneously *types* (formal, archetypal representations of given ideas about good and evil) and *individuals* (idiosyncratic representations of the content of relational, substantial constructions of 'good' and 'evil'.) By doing this, I hope to destabilize given meanings of 'good' and 'evil'.

There are two levels of reading where this dialogic relationship of *type* and *individual* takes place. One level is *internal* to the characters. I study the relationship between their being representations of more or less culturally fixed ideas and images on the one hand and as explorations of good and evil enacted in actual relationships on the other. Another level is where I study the characters from the point of view of *external* dialogues – the complex relation between them and their external 'others' – their author, their co-characters and their readers. Thus, I wish to show how the authoritative element of moral language and agency in life as well as in literature can be seen as intrasubjectively as well as intersubjectively developed, although never abandoning context-sensitivity. This is, I argue, the result of interpreting constructions of moral meaning which are internal to the individual (but fundamentally relational) moral subject (i.e. the intrasubjectivity and context-sensitivity mentioned above), *as well as* studying the dynamics of an ongoing and unfinalized dialogue between the moral subject in relation to external, formal aspects of 'good' and 'evil' (i.e. the intersubjectivity).

Finally, in order to respond to what I have already presented as the "ultimate task" of theological ethics, I will bring the results of the literary and ethical analysis into a discussion of possible theological interpretations of the developed position on conditions for understanding moral authority and agency in a postmodern situation. At this stage the operative question will be: *In what way can conceptualizations of God and God's will for creation be interpreted as correlative to the dialogic view on moral authority and agency which has been developed through the study of literary text?* This will be a brief discussion, and will take place in dialogue primarily with the position of the North American theologian James M. Gustafson, but will also utilize perspectives from Jeffrey Stout who, although not a theologian, has provided insightful reflections on the nature of theological ethical discourse. The main point at this

⁵⁶ The phrasing of these positions are from Tracy, David: *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics and Church*, New York 1994, p.139.

stage, will be to argue how it is possible to interpret conceptions of what one holds to be “the will of God” from the point of view of a contextual, dialogically understood situation. This certainly does not mean that a dimension of religious faith is irrelevant to ethics. It means, however, that the authority by which one acts is not seen as a-historic and foundationally “given” – but the result of a dialogic grappling with one’s interpretative experiences of reality, self, others and God in a process of discernment and humility.

2.3. Delimitation of the Problem Field

A continuous challenge for one who works in a multidisciplinary field such as I do, is to grant the different traditions their due. I place many of my discussions in the intersections between theological, philosophical and literary paths, well aware that the problems I treat have solid backgrounds in their singular traditions. It is of course not possible to cover all relevant aspects of these subjects, but my hope is that I do not disparage their value. There are some areas in particular in which I would have liked to develop further with respect to my argument, but where it has been necessary to draw the line. Although I see my task as rather broad, it is nevertheless narrow in the wider scheme of the academia. The questions I pose and the problems I discuss have necessarily provided the scope for what I thematize to various degrees of depth.

For instance, the field of ‘narrative ethics’ is large, and although I touch upon some central themes within it, this is not a thesis about narrative ethics in general, nor on the relation between literature and ethics in all its variations. Another relevant field which I do not discuss in depth, is the current debate on universal versus particular ethics. A reason for this is, as shall become clear, that it is part of my argument to dissolve some of the tension inherent in the dichotomy. Yet a delimitation I must draw, is with respect to the field of Murdoch-studies. Naturally, I have studied much literary criticism concerning the work of Murdoch, and I draw heavily upon it. However, it is important that I do not see my own work primarily as a contribution to Murdoch scholarship (although this would be a welcome side-effect), but rather that I use such scholarship in order to make some theological and philosophical points.

A further issue that I have given much less explicit attention than I could wish, is the feminist perspective. I do, however, see close and crucial parallels between critical feminism and the work I do. An important aspect of a feminist contribution (both to the academia as well as in a wider political sense) is to challenge the given authority of a patriarchal system. Issues of language, power, identity and systemic structures must all be confronted, and a way in which to

do this is by explicit attention to the different perspectives inherent in a multivoiced reality. In this thesis, I have chosen to concentrate my attention on *theoretical conditions* for an exposure of the apparent givenness of conceptual models and constructions of reality. I have not (for reasons of scope) given much specific notice to the more practical and political implications of this, neither with respect to a social ethic nor to an explicit feminist agenda. However, I sincerely believe that my work can be seen as a contribution to feminism and feminist ethics, or, at least: a different way to a similar goal. In my study of the authority of moral concepts, I have chosen to concentrate on identifying and challenging the manner in which to understand and use such concepts as ‘good’ or ‘evil’. A logical extension from this is that the theoretical position I develop will also be of help in order to challenge in the same way the (often hidden) formal authority of *other* concepts: for instance, it is necessary to discuss the conditions for how concepts such as ‘woman’ or ‘femininity’ or ‘equality’ are constructed. My arguments for seeing moral authority as dialogically developed and internally substantial to the subject/agent, might provide a model for challenging our own and other people’s (moral) language and agency. Thus, although this has not been precisely formulated during the work I do, a feminist attitude has been a driving force, an ideal and a perspective from which I have been informed throughout.

Finally, I wish to point out a problem concerning terminology. This is a challenge when working across traditional borderlines, as words tend to have somewhat different usage and connotations in different disciplines. As far as possible I explain my own usage, and provide definitions and clarifications where I see this to be necessary. However, on the whole I tend towards a pragmatic approach to terminology, in which I actively and positively use the linguistic and conceptual ambiguity inherent in the multidisciplinary approach I take to the problem field of moral authority and agency.

3. A Presentation of Iris Murdoch

3.1. A Snapshot of a Philosopher and Novelist

I have now several times mentioned Iris Murdoch and her work, and at this stage a more thorough introduction is necessary. First of all: it is important to the thesis’s aim and structure that the mentioned novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, is the main material in this study. This means that a distinction must be made between Murdoch as a philosopher and Murdoch as a novelist, although, as shall become clear, I do not draw a harsh line between her two fields of

activity.⁵⁷ In this thesis, the voice of Murdoch as a novelist is dominant. The role of Murdoch as a philosopher is to provide a textual voice “other” to the literary text.⁵⁸ This voice enters the dialogue at several different places, where the first is here in the present chapter. I have chosen to introduce this voice early – before entering the literary analysis, in order to make transparent the prominent place it has in this thesis.

For many of her readers, both Murdoch’s literary and philosophical texts have inspired thought and provided constructive models of thinking that have served as catalysts towards developing a new understanding of how to relate to and communicate questions of ethics and morality in contemporary discourse.⁵⁹ Her philosophical career began in 1953 with the publication of *Sartre. Romantic Rationalist*⁶⁰, and her first novel, *Under the Net*⁶¹ was published in 1954. After publishing several essays that include discussions of the relation between art and philosophy and provide critical assessment of the logical-positivist tradition of the time, Murdoch’s most famous philosophical work, *The Sovereignty of Good*,⁶² was published in 1970. Her work is original and represents an early stage of the massive critique of modernity that has exploded since she first attempted to criticize what in a rather imprecise and baggy terminology she refers to as a behaviourist-existentialist-utilitarian image of modern man; the result of a “happy and fruitful marriage of Kantian liberalism with Wittgensteinian logic solemnized by Freud.”⁶³ This was before the modern/postmodern distinction was established as accepted terminology. Her work is therefore internally critical to the modern project in a Post-Wittgensteinian Oxbridge environment, where also philosophers like Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot were central partakers.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ See the discussion in Part II, Chapter 6: “Bakhtin and the Relation Between Murdoch’s Genres”.

⁵⁸ Later, I will give an introduction to two other such voices, namely those of Ricoeur and Bakhtin. First, in the theoretical and methodological considerations of Part II, and also in Part IV – where the trio is set on the main stage for a while. This thesis is not primarily an analysis of these three thinkers. Their interpreted voices are, however, important to my argument.

⁵⁹ Although they do not necessarily agree with her, Charles Taylor, Stanley Hauerwas, Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre and many other ethicists and philosophers refer to Iris Murdoch as an early inspiration in the development of their own work. See for instance: Antonacchio and Schweiker: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, p.3 (Taylor), p.36 (Nussbaum) and p.190 (Hauerwas). MacIntyre’s review of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, “Which World Do You See?” in: *New York Times* January 3, 1993, is also interesting in this respect. (<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/20/specials/murdoch-metaphysics.html>, 11.09.2004)

⁶⁰ Murdoch, Iris: *Sartre. Romantic Rationalist*. London 1954.

⁶¹ Murdoch, Iris: *Under the Net*. London 1953.

⁶² Murdoch, Iris: *The Sovereignty of Good*. London 1970.

⁶³ Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.9.

⁶⁴ Anscombe and Foot were both friends and colleagues of Murdoch, and the three women played an important role on the contemporary philosophical scene in Oxford and Cambridge. However, while

A statement from *The Sovereignty of Good* concerning Murdoch's epistemological and anthropological perspectives sets much of the tone of what her philosophy represents:

The idea of 'objective reality' (...) undergoes important modifications when it is to be understood, not in relation to 'the world described by science', but in relation to the progressing life of a person. The active 'reassessing' and 'redefining' which is a main characteristic of live personality often suggests and demands a checking procedure which is a function of individual history. Repentance may mean something different to an individual at different times in his life, and what it fully means is part of this life and cannot be understood except in context.⁶⁵

The quotation represents an antagonism towards the hegemony of what Murdoch calls scientific logic and the authority such logic is given. She seeks alternatives to this by turning to other types of thinking about what is true, for instance that of narrative in context in which the logic of an individual person's life story becomes relevant. Time and change are, according to Murdoch, inherent in objective reality. The idea of humanity involves process and constant redefinition, and this reflective "function of individual history" represents the truth about a person's life. Change and reassessment does not obscure reality, but pretending that something is externally and scientifically objective in the logical-positivist sense *does*. This is significant, as it is fundamental to Murdoch's critique of the enlightenment project and thus the starting point for her and others' attempts to reconstruct alternative visions of morality in a postmodern situation.

This short introduction to some of Murdoch's main themes should explain some of the motivation I have had to study her work in relation to what I have articulated as the problem of moral authority. The challenging of objective "scientific" logic and language which is central to her work corresponds to the intention I have to make transparent and possibly destabilize the place of formal, given definitions of moral concepts. Her insistence that "objective reality" is not static, but must correspond to time, change and context is relevant to the shift I seek towards seeing the necessary elements of conviction and persuasion as inherent in the idea of substantial authority.

Murdoch developed a Platonic direction to her philosophy, the two others to a large extent represent an Aristotelian tradition.

⁶⁵ Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.26.

3.2. A Biographical Sketch

In this thesis I am concerned with Iris Murdoch's texts and not the person. I have, however, chosen to include a short biographical presentation.⁶⁶ This is primarily because she is relatively unfamiliar in a Scandinavian context, both as novelist and philosopher. To give such attention to the author is, however, not unproblematic. Many would insist that the texts themselves should be given priority, and that biographical information on the author is irrelevant to textual analysis. To a certain extent, I agree that the texts have, and should have, such priority. Nevertheless, to create an artificial barrier between an author and her work easily becomes a reductionistic falsity. A consequence of ignoring the relationship between author and text would for instance mean that I could not work under the assumption that I analyse different-genred texts by the same author. It would mean I have two authors (not) to relate to: the novelist Murdoch, and the philosopher Murdoch. I could not then assume that the different texts were written by the same person, neither could I search for points of interaction between texts of the two genres. However, it is necessary that I critically discuss the relation between the novels, the philosophical text, and their author, and not take for granted that the connection between them is unproblematic. For the time being, however, here is a sketch of the life of Iris Murdoch:

Jean Iris Murdoch was born in Ireland in 1919, and died in Oxford, Britain, in 1999. She grew up in England as a single child in an Irish Protestant family. During her first school years, she attended a local Froebel institute and from the age of 12, she went to Badminton School in Bristol. During her years at Badminton she became politically aware, renounced her Christian faith and later became a Marxist, although she moved markedly away from Marxism as she grew older. Her religious position continued to be "Anglican atheist", but influenced by a strong Buddhist tendency. From 1938, Murdoch was enrolled at Somerville Women's College at Oxford University. Here she read Greats (classical languages, philosophy and history of antiquity). In 1942, she began a career in The Civil Service. After the war she worked with refugees for UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), first in London, later in Belgium and Austria. Through this work, she experienced the consequences of human evil, and remained interested in problems of good and evil throughout her writings in

⁶⁶ The following, largely descriptive, presentations of biography, literary and philosophical texts are to some extent translated extractions from an earlier work I have done on Murdoch. (Stenseng, Maud Marion Laird: "Med kjærlighetens blikk. En undersøkelse og vurdering av det narrative aspektet ved Iris Murdochs dydsetikk". M.A. thesis at The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, Oslo 1998, p.23-27). They are, however, edited and added to in view of the present thesis's quite different problem field.

moral philosophy and in her novels. From 1947, she continued her studies in philosophy, with a year in Cambridge before she left to return to Oxford and St Anne's College, in a post teaching philosophy. She retired from teaching philosophy in 1963, but continued living and writing in Oxford until she died. After some unhappy experiences in love, she met John Bayley, professor in English Literature, in 1954. They were married in 1956 and never had any children. In addition to being a prominent literary critic, Bayley has also written novels. He has lately had success with several memoirs of his life with Iris,⁶⁷ one of which was produced as a Golden Globe- and Academy Award-winning film in 2002.⁶⁸ In 1987 Murdoch was granted a DBE (Dame of the British Empire), and bears the right to the title Dame Iris. Her portrait was painted the same year, and is exhibited in The National Portrait Gallery in London. In 1997 she was sadly diagnosed to have Alzheimer's disease. She died in 1999 after having spent the last years of her life in a world more or less her own, or as she herself said: "A very, very bad quiet place, a dark place".⁶⁹

3.3. Murdoch's Literary Texts

After Murdoch's debut as novelist in 1954 with *Under the Net*, she wrote 25 novels, several plays and some poetry. Her last piece of fiction, *Jackson's Dilemma*, was published in 1995.⁷⁰ She is regarded by many as a great storyteller. The style of writing is elegant, and the compositions of her novels are fine meshes of long and short storylines woven together in intricate patterns. Her knowledge in many areas is large, but her worldview can sometimes come across as rather narrow. She has said that she writes about what she knows, and this is characteristic of her novels. Most of them are placed in the workings and doings of the upper middle class, and the characters are more often than not academics, civil servants or artists. Philosophical themes are often present in one way or another, and not infrequently surface in the form of philosophical and ethical discussions between a novel's characters.⁷¹ Many of Mur-

⁶⁷ Bayley, John: *Iris. A Memoir of Iris Murdoch*. London 1999, and Bayley, John: *Iris and the Friends. A Year of Memories*. London 1999.

⁶⁸ *Iris* (2001), Miramax films. Directed by Richard Eyre, starring Judi Dench, Kate Winslet and Jim Broadbent.

⁶⁹ Quotation from a web-page about Murdoch in the Book section of *The Guardian Online*: (<http://books.guardian.co.uk/authors/author/0,5917,-113,00.html>, 11.09.2004).

⁷⁰ Murdoch, Iris: *Jackson's Dilemma*. London 1995.

⁷¹ The presence of philosophical themes does not mean that they are "idea-novels" as we see for instance in the work of Jean Paul Sartre or Albert Camus, in which the literary texts function more or less as illustrations of a philosophical stance. Her two first novels, however, stand in close relation to specific philosophies. *Under the Net* is a novel about being "caught by language". Here Murdoch visualises and thereby discusses a Wittgensteinian philosophy. *A Severed Head* is a comment on exis-

doch's novels treat the relationship between appearance and reality, and religion and morality. Another common (philosophical) theme is the search for goodness and love in a godless world. At the same time, it is not fair to say that her novels are purely philosophical.⁷² They are not primarily about ideas, but about the lives and loves of everyday people. The characters' dilemmas and life stories sometimes force philosophical themes to the surface, but the most important aspect of her novels never ceases to be the complexity of human relations which she draws out on the pages.

Murdoch wished to write literature that would convey her fundamental image of life: life has no pattern, aim or meaning.⁷³ This, of course, becomes a problem when it comes to actually having to adhere to literary form. She nevertheless tries to strive towards what in her opinion is good literature, but can seem to fall for the temptation she warns against: to create false, tidy patterns.⁷⁴ At a first glance Murdoch always seems to tidy the threads at the end of a novel, and it looks like an organized whole. However, after working closely with her novels, it becomes clear that they do not "work out". It is almost impossible to follow a thread through to a completely coherent interpretation, and to interpret her novels one must be able to cope with the experience of paradox and ambivalence. Her characters are life-like in the sense that they are difficult to understand. They are hardly ever stereotypes, although they can seem to be so at a certain level, as we shall see. The symbolism is only understandable in part – but all in all a realistic presentation of reality seems to rise out of the words. This is closely related to her philosophy and anthropology. Murdoch does in the end come very close to her ambition, which is to present a complex and varied reality as it really is (even if this reality seems somewhat strange to many!).

Many of her novels include supernatural aspects, for instance UFO's and ghosts. She also frequently uses gothic imagery, such as sinister buildings, overgrown landscapes and experiences of being locked up, of rituals, paranormal visions, scary noises and thunderstorms.

tentialist philosophy. (Murdoch, Iris: *A Severed Head*. London 1961.) Such a direct approach to concrete philosophical themes or traditions is not present in her later work.

⁷² In an early phase of Murdoch criticism (Byatt et al in the 1960's and -70's) critics were concerned with the discussion of what the relation between Murdoch as novelist and philosopher was. This is a discussion which now has less relevance to the reception of her work. See to this, a discussion in Heusel, Barbara Stevens: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels. Thirty Years of Critical Reception*, USA 2001. p.8-9.

⁷³ Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.78.

⁷⁴ Bradbury and MacFarlane (eds.): *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature*, p.412: "Today the relationship between the fictive and the real remains an active matter of debate around fiction; and, too, within it. The dilemma of which Iris Murdoch speaks she also embodies, in her own writings."

These aspects of her novels give reference to the world of the unknown, and are illustrations of the fact that there is so much we cannot understand. The effect of this technique is a break with the otherwise very bourgeois and traditional tidiness she often tends to convey. This inspires reflective attention to the dark side of humanity, a theme often handled in several ways in her novels. Critics sometimes comment that such a mythical symbolist world is incompatible with her claim that literature should be realistic.⁷⁵ This is an important discussion, but it is necessary to understand that her conception of reality is not parallel to a traditional use of the term ‘realism’ in most literary criticism, where the realistic author’s intention is to render reality in almost photographic precision. Some of this confusion can be explained by reference to a discussion from earlier generations of philosophers. Romantics and enlightenment philosophers had very different conceptions of reality. For the romantics, reality was grounded in the emotional sphere, while for the enlightenment philosophers’ reality was defined by pure rationality. The romantics claimed that the rationalist philosophers did not take emotions seriously, and this is parallel (but not identical) to Murdoch’s insistence that modern (moral) philosophy and literature do not reflect an anthropology or worldview that gives credit to the complexity of human life. There are thus several points of intersection between the romantic uprising against the ideals of the enlightenment, and Murdoch’s critique of her contemporary moral philosophy although the historical contexts make it impossible to say that Murdoch therefore *is* a romantic.

3.4. Murdoch’s Philosophical Texts

“One is writing about philosophy... One is not actually doing the real thing.”⁷⁶ These are Murdoch’s own words about her work. There is, however, no doubt that she provided the philosophical landscape of the time with many original ideas, and inspired many thinkers to develop their own critique of the philosophy of the time. The book on Sartre from 1953 was a very early critique of an existentialist view of the will. The best known and most influential has already been mentioned: *The Sovereignty of Good*. The last book she wrote was *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* in 1992, which some see as her opus magnum, while others are rather embarrassed about its rambling and lack of editing.⁷⁷ An unfinished book on Heidegger

⁷⁵ See for instance discussion of this in Byatt, Antonia S.: *Degrees of Freedom*. London 1994 (1st ed 1965), p.210-217.

⁷⁶ Murdoch quoted by Spear, Hilda D.: *Iris Murdoch*. London 1995, p.8.

⁷⁷ Murdoch, Iris: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London 1992.

is said to exist, but is unlikely to be published.⁷⁸ In 1998 an anthology containing most of her essays, articles and other texts was published under the title *Existentialists and Mystics*. These four books (or rather, three – *The Sovereignty of Good* is included in the latter) form the bulk of material for the analysis of Murdoch's philosophy (which takes second place to the analysis of her novels).

In the following passages I shall give a descriptive presentation of the framework of Murdoch's philosophy. I will not, however, engage in discussion with her views until in Part IV. One reason for giving this presentation of the overarching themes of Murdoch's philosophical project, is that the close reading of the novel in Part III is influenced by knowledge of Murdoch's philosophy, and it is hermeneutically important that my readers are given an opportunity to participate in some of this knowledge. Another reason for presenting Murdochian philosophical themes, is her idiosyncratic style of writing. Much of her terminology is personally coloured by a usage that differs somewhat from other philosophers'. A first reading of her essays is often confusing, as her world is slightly strange and seems internal to her own construction. However, after some study, one becomes familiar with the Murdochian lingo, and the complex webs of thought gradually become clear.

Iris Murdoch's literary and philosophical work has been greatly influenced by three philosophers. The first and foremost is Plato, specifically his idea of *the transcendent Good*. The English emotivist philosopher G. E. Moore and his development of *the undefineability of Good* provides Murdoch with "the frame of the picture" for her work.⁷⁹ For her, the metaphysic good, although real, is undefineable.⁸⁰ The starting point of understanding must therefore be through attention to what is good in real life. Finally, the French philosopher and mystical religious thinker Simone Weil is important to Murdoch in many respects. In particular, her use of the term *attention* to what is other than self has influenced Murdoch greatly.

In his introduction to what he calls Murdoch's *epic philosophy*, the Danish theologian Svend Bjerg identifies three fundamental elements in her work, and these provide good points of entry to her thought.⁸¹ Bjerg's first point is to show that for Murdoch, literature is the highest

⁷⁸ Steiner, George: "Foreword" (p.ix-xviii) in: Murdoch, Iris: *Existentialists and Mystics. Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. London 1997 (Edited by Peter Conradi). p.xiii.

⁷⁹ Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.3.

⁸⁰ Murdoch capitalizes Good when she refers to 'the idea of Good', 'the metaphysic Good', 'the Good' and so forth. I have chosen not to (even when referring to a Murdochian usage) as I do not consider good to have the Platonic status which it has for her. From this follows that I do not treat 'the good' with the same reverence as Murdoch does.

⁸¹ Bjerg, Svend: *Fortælling og Etik*, Denmark 1986, p.13.

form of art. All culture has its roots in literature, according to her. Its fundamental virtues are tolerance, and respect for reality as it is. His second point concerns Murdoch's understanding of what morality is and should be. According to her, morals must have their starting point in the concrete, in contextual reality. It is life as it is experienced that provides the framework for being moral. This is the background to understanding her critique of the current moral philosophy of her time, which in her opinion tended to live in an abstract world of its own, a long distance from reality. A third element, says Bjerg, is concerned with a metaphysic perspective. Moral life must be rooted in reality, but must at the same time include active focusing on and attention towards ideals. The primary ideal is for a moral agent to see true reality, and this must be the basis of philosophy as well. In this third point of entry, Bjerg focuses on the important root metaphor of vision which permeates Murdoch's work, and which I shall discuss later.⁸²

Several factors of life make it difficult to *see* this moral-literary reality. Murdoch values our creative imagination, but differentiates between two aspects of it. The first is *fantasy*, which is negative. It represents human egoism and the ability we have to construct falsifying veils, which distort our vision. These false veils created by our egomaniac fantasy thus stand in the way of our possibilities of seeing true reality. The use of the term 'fantasy' is closely connected to the idea of *consolation*. The complexity, perishableness and meaninglessness of reality is difficult for human beings to handle. In order to cope with these aspects of life, the individual consoles him/herself by creating false systems and illusions for his or her interpretation of life. In this, there are close similarities to a Marxist view, and it would seem that her critique of religion is based on such a conception. Religion is one such consoling fantasy, says Murdoch, and fantasy harms humanity because it leads to egoism. The self-centred ego is deeply problematic for her, as morality must have its basis in a true and just conception of others than oneself.

Imagination, on the other hand, has a positive function. It represents in part humanity's ability to identify with someone else's life situation (empathy), and is an important aspect of the development of moral competence. Good (imaginative) fiction demonstrates this. In fiction, we can discover truthful images of concentrated reality. Imagination thus represents a positive creativity necessary to morality, and can be given form in both literary and scientific logic systems. The only way to penetrate the veils of consolation, i.e. to see reality truthfully, goes

⁸² See Part IV, Chapter 11: "Murdochian Models of Good and Evil".

through love. This ('reality') is a central term in Murdoch's philosophy. Our vision of reality should be based on love, and this loving vision is what Murdoch calls *attention*. Attention is disciplined vision, directed past the ego and focused on the other person's needs. Such vision is not neutral, but is reality seen in the light of the good. This is deeply inspired by Platonic thought. Plato uses vision as his primary metaphor of consciousness – as in the metaphor of the cave. True reality can only be seen in the light from the sun. Unobscured reality can thus only be perceived by a vision seeking goodness.

Murdoch further states that such true reality is only visible to us in metaphoric (literary) language. This understanding of metaphor differs from a simple aesthetic understanding of the term. Metaphors are our way of reinterpreting reality, as they show us the deep relationship between a metaphysic reality beyond our known reality (c.f. the sun beyond the cave). The language of narrative, of stories and literature, refers to what Murdoch calls a pre-linguistic reality, where the true nature of reality is goodness. The narration of the movement from the cave to the sun is a fundamental metaphor of moral growth. For Murdoch then, the primary task of moral philosophy is to develop a set of terms that will enable us to reflect upon morality in a way that transcends human experience, at the same time as staying deeply in touch with human life reality. In practice, this means that her philosophy is concerned with developing a metaphysic horizon for morality, rather than constructing simple ready-made recipes of what to do and what not to. It is therefore the activity that lies between the actions humans do, and the mental (but not necessarily private) background, which is important to Murdoch.

How do we link our deepest understanding of the world and the life we live to the actions we actually perform? At a deep level, Murdoch understands morality as a cleansing of this "in-between" process, so that when the moment of choice arrives, the quality of our attention will already have conditioned the decision. The aim then, is to see clearly and truthfully, past our own egoism and false conceptions of reality. The ability to love is the primary qualification of a moral self. Moreover, the "test" of this is our ability to respond to other peoples' needs before our own. This complex of anthropology, the meaning of moral language and cognition, their links to action and the moral task – are all important aspects of my examination of moral authority, and will be discussed in greater depth in relation to the further development and refraction of Murdoch's ideas as it takes place in the novelistic discourse.

3.5. Primary Textual Material

Written in 1970, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* represents the middle era of her novelistic career, and is among the most popular of her novels.⁸³ The critic Hilda Spear has organized Murdoch's work in periods that reflect the main themes that are treated, and the chosen novel belongs to what Spear calls "Conflicts of Good and Evil".⁸⁴ The main reason for my choice is – as has been mentioned – that several of the characters in the novel are written as an exploration of central moral concepts, for instance what it means to be good, evil or human.⁸⁵ In addition, the novel was written close in time to when the three essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* were published, which are the most important texts in her philosophical production. As a preliminary introduction to the novel I quote the cover of the paperback edition, where the novel is presented as "The story of a battle between good and evil...".⁸⁶ At a very basic level, this introduces the reader to the central theme of the story. As with similar descriptions of *The Lord of the Rings*, many people are likely to be put off by such a blurb, expecting to find clean-cut heroes and villains in a text described in such a manner. However, Murdoch does not treat the theme with simplistic imagery, shallow characters or a predictable storyline, but provides a complex exploration of the inhabitants of the novel and what they represent.

In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* two of the central characters are at a first glance representative of the abstract ideas of 'evil' (Julius King) and 'good' (Tallis Browne). There is much evidence in the novels to give such an impression, for instance extensive vampire-symbolism in relation to Julius, and many indications that the Tallis-figure is constructed as a transfiguration of Christ.⁸⁷ In this sense, the characters are representative of what Murdoch calls "guiding metaphysic moral ideals". However, I argue that such constructed and stereotypic images of good and evil do not actually function well in the novel, although they play an important role in an intuitive identification of the characters. Throughout the narrative, these characters can be interpreted as developing from being cardboard ideas into credible and complicated human beings – loving, hurting, living people. The contexts of their stories provide a destabi-

⁸³ A rather unqualified statement, but it is my impression from internet discussions, amazon.com ranking lists, original reviews and critical evaluations, which all represent subjective opinions. Personally, I do not see *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* as one of Murdoch's best novels. It is, however, an interesting piece of work, and my reasons for studying this novel should have become apparent above. (I might also be allowed to mention that *The Black Prince* is my favourite, with respect to style, story and suspense. Murdoch, Iris: *The Black Prince*, London 1973).

⁸⁴ Spear: *Iris Murdoch*, p.55.

⁸⁵ See for instance Heusel, Barbara Stevens: *Patterned Aimlessness. Iris Murdoch's Novels of the 1970s and 1980s*. Athens and London 1995, p.225.

⁸⁶ From the front page of the paperback edition of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

⁸⁷ This will be discussed extensively in the character analyses of Part V.

lizing effect on the abstract moral qualities Julius and Tallis initially represent. The novel can also be studied with a view to how the characters oscillate between being credible and not. Further, not only the personifications of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are to be studied, but also the character Morgan, who represents the human soul over whom the cosmic forces fight, will be studied from the point of view of credibility. Thus, the novel’s credibility and inherent moral authority is dependent on the dynamic interaction of the pre-conceptualised ideas of good and evil on the one hand and on the other, the messy human relations in which they are brought to life. The “givenness” of what moral concepts mean becomes challenged, and their substantive content is somewhat reconstructed in the ambiguous and undefineable world a novel represents.

4. An Outline of The Thesis’s Landscape and Structure

4.1. The Landscape

Many academics imagine their work as a journey in an arduous mountainous landscape, which is usually an apt metaphor for the process of learning and for developing a theoretical position. Such journeys are easily imagined as a long trip with a given point of departure and a somewhat clear goal, along a path which ideally is to be as straight and effective as possible. I too imagine my work and the resulting text as a journey, but the endeavour is not to move forcefully towards a goal in the distance. The landscape that I visualize, and within which I work, is more like a large, mostly flat, open field which is full of little things to be noticed: flowers, straw, grass, rocks, and insects. Many parts of this field have been explored by others, but there are many as yet unexplored areas. I do not believe I can escape the field, nor do I think that my wanderings can or should have a straightforward linear route from a beginning to a goal. It is more a criss-crossing movement where I move backwards and forwards, right and left, gradually forming a network of knowledge covering ever larger parts of the particular local geography.

The journey through the field has, however, not been without a plan, nor has it been aimless. I have wished to become familiar with it in order to see in further detail what there is to be found and to reflect over this. Therefore, I have followed several different philosophical, literary and theological paths, continuously bringing with me the experience of what I have seen from the other paths. I have stopped at some of their many points of intersection in order to contemplate the view from there, taking in the different perspectives and questioning them

and their relations to each other. My own exploration and mapping of this landscape will hopefully contribute to showing a reader some of the exciting things I have found, and inspire a visit of one's own in order to find more. However, I not only explore with an aim – although this is an important part of what I do. I also describe what I see, and not least, I sometimes try to creatively and reflectively imagine myself outside of or above the field in order to better contemplate and make transparent the complexity of what I see.

An image must, however, not be taken too far. An uncritical imagination of the field as metaphor might lead to a misguided attitude concerning for instance the relation between perspective and wholeness. It could seem that I imagine the reality which the field symbolizes as one: a romantic, summery easy landscape which can be grasped if I wander in it long enough. I know this is not so, and am also aware that the image does not take into account that reality is not static. A landscape is “given” whereas reality changes. Reality has no unity which is the sum of all perspectives. The perspectives are all relative to each other. This having been pointed out, I nevertheless imagine this thesis to be a log from my wanderings in a distinct field of contemporary ethical theory, knowing that I could have chosen others. I know that my interpretive perspectives could have been other than those I have had, but as it is impossible for a gravity-bound human to see from the vantage point of a bird, I have sought to articulate adequate reasons for why some particular perspectives have been selected for further scrutiny.

4.2. The Thesis's Structure and Design

The thesis is written in six parts, all of which are quite unlike each other. That I have chosen to enter the problem field of moral authority through several different gates and following paths from there, is a theoretically important choice. The intention has been to show some of the complexity and multiplicity of moral voices in the ethical dialogue in which I (as one among many voices) have become involved and am embedded. However, although the six parts are varied in focus, length and style, each of them is dependent on the preceding one, in the sense that at each new stage I supplement the discussion from where it was left off. I hope to make these transitions as transparent as possible. The method I have chosen of bringing the discussion further by a gradual integration of new perspectives (not only new arguments), necessarily involves taking several different points of departure.⁸⁸ Thus, although the construction of the thesis might be experienced as rather complex, it is deliberately organized so

⁸⁸ See a more thorough presentation for the chosen method and its background in Part II.

as not being linear. This enables me to return again and again to the problem at the centre with ever new insight which is helpful for further discussions.

The literary analysis itself is not introduced until I have moved quite far into both the text and the argument. This could lead to a reading in which the literary text only serves to illustrate the already argued case – which would be counter to my intention. The design is deliberate, however, in that I have wished to elaborate the interpretative conditions for analysis as well as outlining the problem itself as a “voice”, which is to enter into dialogue with the novel.

In Part I, which now draws to an end, I have been concerned with outlining several different aspects of the scope of the present work. I have identified the particular field within which I work, its horizons, and the different directions in which I have chosen to proceed in order to best explore the landscape. On the basis of a discussion of moral authority and agency, the tasks have been further developed and formulated as specific operative questions. (These will be expanded at the stages and contexts in which they are appropriate.) As a novel by Iris Murdoch forms the material basis for my discussions, and because her philosophy has been relevant to my interpretations of this novel, I have included an introduction to both her literary and philosophical contributions. This background serves as a wide point of reference throughout the thesis, in particular when I later concentrate on more specific aspects of her work.

In Part II, I will introduce and develop both theoretical and methodological concerns. I begin these considerations by arguing further for a specific use of hermeneutic theory as the fundamental theoretical mode of my approach. It is central to the argument of the thesis that hermeneutics must be understood as a dialogic process, in which paradox, incommensurability and conflict are inherently part of the meaning-making activity. In continuation of this, I proceed to a discussion of some more specific and concrete methodological problems and possibilities – particularly with respect to the literary analysis.

Parts III and V together provide the main body of the dissertation, in the sense that they are where the actual analyses of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* take place. I have no ambition to cover all aspects of interest in the novel, which would be an impossible feat. Part III therefore consists of a close, analytic reading of chapters and scenes which have been selected by a certain criterion: the selected parts of the novel text are those which have proved to be of particular importance to Part V's literary and ethical discussion of character and moral authority. Part III is quite long, and not where many of the thesis's substantial discussions take place.

However, it is a necessary part of the text for three reasons. First, it is primarily here that I clarify and present my own interpretation of the novel text, thus making the later discussion more transparent – both with respect to readers who have read the novel and those who have not. Secondly, on the basis of arguments from the preceding parts, I here explain why the different scenes have been selected for scrutiny, thus linking the introductory parts of the thesis with the in-depth discussions to come. Thirdly, it is important that without this broader reading of the novel there is a danger that the analysis of Part V can tend towards solipsistic readings of the three characters. The analysis in Part III brings the full cast of characters into play, as a fundamental relational context for the more individually focused readings of characters which will take place in Part V.

In Part IV, I depart from the literary analysis. This echoes the hermeneutic and non-linear position developed in Part II in the sense that I see this work as a dynamic dialogue between disciplines, voices and positions. The discussion there thus paves the way for Part IV's presentations of the three main partners in conversation with Murdoch (as a novelist) and myself, namely Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch (as a philosopher). These three thinkers themselves also provide arguments for such a structuring of the thesis. To borrow Ricoeur's words, my project is one of "detour". Murdoch speaks of philosophy as a "two-way movement" between the particular and the general. In Bakhtinian terminology, I have attempted to write a thesis as heteroglossic (i.e. using different languages) as possible in an academic piece of work – an attempt which is expressed most clearly in the interaction between multidisciplinary languages of academic discourse.

The terminology and theoretical constructions which the three thinkers provide, have influenced my reading of Murdoch's novel. It is important to clarify my reading and understanding of them before I enter the analysis of literary character and moral authority in Part V. Therefore, I interpret carefully chosen texts. The intention is not primarily to critically discuss these texts (although I do this to some extent), but to provide a comprehensive basis for the theoretical use I make of them throughout the analysis and discussion.⁸⁹ Further, the chapters in Part IV differ somewhat: the analysis of Ricoeur's book *Oneself as Another* is close to a summary. However, a summary is, in fact, a critically reflected interpretation of a text, and aspects of Ricoeur's position are discussed at several different stages throughout the text of the thesis. The presentation of Bakhtin is structured as an analysis of his central terminology,

⁸⁹ One could argue that this text ought to be placed *before* the literary analysis, but this would undermine the central position the novel has as the primary "place" for ethical reflection.

and the chapter on Murdoch consists of an analysis of visual imagery in her philosophy. The choice to write about Ricoeur and Bakhtin in sub-chapters (Chapter 10), while giving attention to Murdoch on her own in a Chapter 11, reflects the slightly more central status Murdoch the philosopher's voice has in relation to the two others. However, they interact in the discussion at the same logical level.

Part V is a discursive extension from the close literary focus of Part III. Chapter 13 contains introductions to the concept of character in both literary and ethical analysis. First, I discuss this concept as it is developed and challenged in literary theory. Following this, my presentation will include further Ricoeurian, Bakhtinian and Murdochian perspectives, in order to explain how the thematic complex of character, ethics and moral authority is to be brought together. I also spend some space and time on a critical discussion of a certain branch of what can be called 'character ethics', which will serve to clarify aspects of my own agenda as an ethicist. Included in Chapter 13 is a critical discussion of some challenges I face during the actual literary and ethical analysis, and I bring some methodological problems into action. Chapter 14 is a focused analytic discussion of what happens when I read the three selected characters (including a section on the rest of the characters as well) as on the one hand archetypes, and on the other, idiosyncratic "persons", in relation to each other. In this Chapter I also finally (or rather, *unfinally*) summarize the discussion, conclude my argument, and open up to further possible challenges in the wake of what I have done in this work.

In Part VI, I shall indicate possible theological implications of what I have found through the examination of the novel. A comment on the thesis's design must be made here: the reason for bringing theological perspectives into the dialogue so late in the process, has been to avoid an interpretation of the novel that rests on theological assumptions. The literary analysis of character and authority is therefore performed using arguments accessible to readers outside a theological discourse. However, this does not mean that I hold objective, or neutral, interpretations to be possible. In Part II, I shall explain my method of analysis, which I have called "relational readings". This method is inspired by both Ricoeur and Bakhtin. Fundamental here, as I have also argued in Part I, is that I as a reader cannot imagine myself to be free of subjective, contextually conditioned perspectives, embedded as I am in my own contexts (of which my theological tradition is one). Such freedom would, I believe, be impossible. I also hold that as a reader, I am fundamentally part of the interactive dialogue which takes place in the process of reading and meaning-making (or interpretation). I cannot strip my reading of a theological or other particular perspective, but I can, and must, make my voice audible and

myself visible as interpreter in order not to misuse the power I have as she who develops an argument based on an interpretation of literary text.

4.3. Literature and Philosophy in Ethical Dialogue

I have now introduced and argued for a certain approach to what I have identified as the problem field of moral authority in a postmodern situation. The study of one of Iris Murdoch's literary texts brought into philosophical and theological discourse, is intended to provide a way by which to destabilize simplistic and probably untrue ideas of what (moral) authority is and is not by way of dealing with the vast varieties of human experiences of the good life. This perspective reflects a wish to continue the critique of anthropology, epistemology and ethical theories of modernity, by seeking viable alternative sets of thinking about moral language and its authority with relevance for contemporary ethics. However, the work I do will also reflect the conviction that it is necessary to retain the possibility of being able to speak of somewhat formal aspects of moral concepts which transcend the plurality of stories and situations – although this can never be the starting point. It is important that such “transcendence” is not to be conceptualised with the help of a hierarchical pyramid, but in the sense of changing perspectives as seen from different points in a web, or field, in their dynamic relation to one another. I wish to show in what manner the structure of Murdoch's ethical theory can provide the means of dealing with such a double aim (and approach). Her contribution can be studied critically and be illuminated by the reflective hermeneutics that the philosophy of Ricoeur provides, and through the use of the metaphors of dialogue and different voices that Bakhtin has developed. The aim is to show how the moral voices of and in literature and philosophy can contribute to an ethical dialogue more able to cope with the complexity and paradoxes of human life reality – and how such a dialogue can provide new and fruitful ways of understanding moral authority.

PART II: Relational Hermeneutics – On Theory and Method

5. A Hermeneutic Approach to Theological Ethics

5.1. Setting the Stage

I have now developed the problem of the thesis, presented and discussed its background and horizon, and introduced Iris Murdoch's literary and philosophical work as partners in conversation for a discussion of moral authority. In the following chapters, I will consider some of my central theoretical and methodological assumptions. In short, the aim of Part II is to show how hermeneutics is seen as an (*the?*) appropriate approach to studies in theological ethics,⁹⁰ in particular with respect to developing further the preliminary dialogic understanding of substantial, internal moral authority that I have introduced. Several times in Part I, I hinted at the viability of a hermeneutic approach. Recapping some of these instances can serve as a point of entry to clarifying the agenda of Part II.

I *first* mentioned hermeneutics when showing how narrative, relational, and literary epistemological perspectives can be helpful and productive in attempts to interpret and reconstruct certain aspects of ethical theory in a postmodern situation. It was important here to highlight the recognition of perspectivity, and the acknowledgement of complex structures of difference as fundamental to establishing *thicker* anthropologies and theories of knowledge. Part II will include a discussion of how these aspects are of crucial importance as theoretical foundations for the work I do. I shall also explain shortly why I understand both Ricoeur and Bakhtin to be important voices in this respect, in anticipation of their entrance to the field in Part IV.

The *second* time a hermeneutic approach was mentioned in Part I, was with reference to the discussion of Habermas and his discourse ethics as one possible approach to handling the re-

⁹⁰ To my presentation of hermeneutics, I have referred to texts by Ricoeur and Gadamer (Ricoeur, Paul: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on language, action and interpretation*. Cambridge UK, 1981, and Ricoeur: *Oneself as Another*, and Gadamer, Hans-Georg: *Forståelsens filosofi: utvalgte hermeneutiske skrifter*, Oslo 2003 (translated by Helge Jordheim) and *Truth and Method*, New York 1989 (transl. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. - 2nd, rev. ed.)). I have also made use of background material from the following comprehensive introductions to the subject: Jeanrond, Werner: *Theological Hermeneutics. Development and Significance*. Suffolk UK 1991. Henriksen, Jan-Olav (ed.): *Tegn, tekst, tolk. Teologisk hermeneutikk i fortid og nåtid*. Oslo 1994, Henriksen: *På grensen til Den andre*. Lundin, Roger, Clarence Walhout and Anthony C. Thisleton (eds.): *The Promise of Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge UK 1999. Thisleton, Anthony C: *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1992. Guldal, Jesper and Martin Møller (eds.): *Hermeneutikk. En antologi om forståelse*, Denmark 1999 and Fodor, James: *Christian Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology*,. Oxford 1995.

lation between power, language and authority. The point made there was that I have found Ricoeurian and Bakhtinian perspectives more helpful in discussing the reflective relation between objective and subjective aspects of moral language than that provided by Habermasian (formal and universal) discourse ethics. Essentially, I find that the two thinkers are better than Habermas at retaining the idea of the untranscendable embeddedness of both the subject and object of interpretation. In Part I, I argued that Ricoeur and Bakhtin not only provide theoretical, but also methodological perspectives to my work. Thus their work is relevant both for the argument of the thesis as a whole as well as at the more specific level of interpretation of literary text. This doubleness of theory and method is, however, not uncontroversial in hermeneutics, and will need to be discussed.

On this background, I shall here in Chapter 5 present some aspects of the particular brand of dialogic hermeneutics which I appropriate in my approach. This will *first* involve a discussion of the possible understandings of hermeneutics with regard to how the tradition is to be classified – as theory or method? What is actually meant by the distinction, and how is the relation between theory and method in hermeneutics to be handled? *Secondly*, I present what I hold to be the most important hermeneutical insights with regard to my work. In doing this, I also clarify distinctions between different traditions within the field of hermeneutics. *Thirdly*, I use hermeneutics to argue for an understanding of theological ethics as simultaneously *part of* and at a *critical distance from* the culture within which it (by way of the theologian) is situated and embedded. Part of this discussion involves understanding the role of theological ethics as part of an interdisciplinary dialogue. The *fourth* intention is to position myself in the field I by now will have outlined. *Fifthly*, I provide short introductions to Ricoeur and Bakhtin. These subchapters of Chapter 5 all include arguments for seeing the act of interpreting literary text as both a theoretically and methodically important contribution to ethical reflection in a theological context. Before summarizing and concluding Part II, several aspects of and reflections about the concrete methodological approach I use to open up my literary studies of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, will be examined in Chapter 6.

It is important at this stage to be aware that Part II is about more than just providing tools and perspectives to the reading and discussion of Murdoch (although this is part of the intention). As should be becoming clear by now, the discussion of moral authority is followed along many paths. Thus, the forthcoming discussions of hermeneutics, multidisciplinary and the approach to a methodology of reading are all inherently part of the accumulative argument as such.

5.2. Hermeneutics – Theory or Method?

An important debate within hermeneutic tradition, is that of whether or not one considers hermeneutics to be a more or less all-encompassing theoretical perspective, or if it can be understood (at least partially) as method. Two adversaries in this question are Gadamer, who insists that hermeneutics is *not* a method, and Ricoeur, who agrees that it is *more* than a method, but that it can also be seen as a way of thinking which is instrumental to understanding particular texts, or for instance works of art and literature. The first category is thus somewhat theory-orientated, the second is primarily about methodology. This debate is important to me in this thesis, as I have found hermeneutics to be relevant both as theory and methodological perspective. Further, as shall become clear, the borders between theory and method ought not to be drawn too harshly. But what does the debate involve? And why is it relevant to me?

Gadamer's argument is centred on the achievement of understanding as the result of a hermeneutic process where one horizon (pre-understanding of for instance a text) fuses with another horizon (the meaning of the text). This cannot be done by a particular method, according to Gadamer. As 'method', hermeneutics would be reduced to a simple technique, not the 'practical philosophy' he understands hermeneutics to be.⁹¹ Rather, hermeneutics has for him to do with a certain positive attitude to the ideal of reaching, or finding, the 'truth'. However, as Habermas has pointed out, Gadamer's theory is too optimistic about the possibility of attaining an acceptable degree of truth. His position is particularly susceptible to the repression of a critical evaluation of the particular elements in a truth-seeking process. Habermas's response to this is, as has been mentioned earlier, to establish criteria for defining a formal method of securing a communication and search for understanding free of unreflected elements of power, ideology and prejudice. Thus, there is a marked dichotomy between Gadamer's and Habermas's approach to hermeneutics. Insofar as it is helpful towards interpretation of reality, meaning and truth (and communication of this), it is a question of theory versus method.

Ricoeur comments on the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, and wishes to bring the insights to a further level by arguing that the methodological aspect of hermeneutics is integral to the theoretical project, but that hermeneutics cannot be reduced to method: "[H]ermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the inter-

⁹¹ As I shall soon show, the understanding of method that I subscribe to in this thesis, is probably less technical/instrumental than what Gadamer here understands method to be.

pretation of texts.”⁹² Important here, is the actual subject of interpretation – the *person* who seeks truth, meaning and understanding in texts and otherwise. In order to secure the search for truth as freely as possible from ideological distortion, it is, according to Ricoeur, important that issues of subjectivity in relation to a text are discussed. Says Ricoeur: “For the primary concern of hermeneutics is not to discover an intention hidden behind the text but to unfold a world in front of it.”⁹³ Thus, it is not primarily with regard to the author’s subjectivity and truth (meaning behind the text), but in order to establish the reader’s subjectivity and truth (meaning in front of the text) that method is necessary. So, what does this involve?

One of Ricoeur’s contributions in this respect has been to establish what he calls a hermeneutics of suspicion – where one’s own position and horizon must always be the object of scrutiny. This is in itself a hermeneutic process. In order to seek what he calls “authentic self-understanding”, which includes a critical suspicion of ideology, the reader must distance him- or herself from self. This can be done by applying methods for reading. Method serves to relativize the perspective of the subject, thus securing some degree of objectivity, which is a necessary part of challenging the certainty of one’s own truths. (Note, though, that the interpreting subject is never decontextualized in this process!) Ricoeur says that “in reading, I ‘unrealise myself’”.⁹⁴ Thus, the reader’s response cannot be taken at face value, just as the author’s more or less hidden meaning cannot be held as authoritative. Method is thus a process of countering radical relativism while retaining an understanding of the subject as completely embedded in context. Method represents and sharpens the reader’s reflexivity. False consciousness can be countered by using methods which secure a transparency of reading in which my own prejudices and historical perspectives are not ignored, but challenged.⁹⁵

This raises what I believe is an important question concerning the relation between theory and method in this thesis. I follow Ricoeur in his construction of an understanding of hermeneutics as being partially method, but that method must be understood as a necessary part of a theoretical whole. Therefore, when I speak of Ricoeur and Bakhtin as suppliers of both theoretical and methodological perspectives, I do not see these concepts as being sharply distinct

⁹² Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p.43.

⁹³ Same book, p.94.

⁹⁴ Same book, p.94.

⁹⁵ I often find that in presentations and usage of a Ricoeurian “hermeneutics of suspicion”, the suspicion of hidden cultural codes is more often than not focused on the object of interpretation, not the subject. This is obviously a central point, but I think an important issue for Ricoeur, namely the awareness of the opacity of consciousness at *all* stages of an interpretative process, therefore becomes somewhat obscured. (See for instance Henriksen (ed): *Tegn, tekst, tolk*, p.229-233). I will not enter further into this discussion now, other than draw attention to it.

from each other, albeit somewhat different. I also hold that method in this respect is to be understood as a more wide and substantial term than if one reduces the meaning of ‘method’ to ‘technical skill’. In other words: although skills are important in order to develop and understand the two other dimensions of understanding, they represent a level of understanding “below” both method and theory. Theory is the structure of thought by which to discuss ‘truth’, and ‘meaning’ and so on. Method is the process of suspending one’s ego in relation to the text, thus securing as far as possible a “true” and ethically responsible understanding of the text and the reality to which it responds.⁹⁶ Likewise, in the final chapter of Part II in which I present the methodology of the literary analysis, it will become clear that I see method primarily as a certain *attitude* to text: a way of enabling myself to read the texts critically. Skills are instrumental to this, but are not “method” in themselves.

A helpful terminology with respect to the importance of understanding both theory and method as aspects of hermeneutics, is the distinction the Swedish/German theologian Werner Jeanrond establishes between what he calls ‘macro-hermeneutics’ and ‘micro-hermeneutics’.⁹⁷ The first concerns the critical search for principles for interpreting reality, or the universe, and the second focuses on understanding “individual expressions of a linguistic or artistic nature”. This is somewhat parallel to Jan-Olav Henriksen’s use of the difference between what he in Norwegian calls ‘forståelseshermeneutikk’ (translated: *hermeneutics of understanding*) and ‘metodehermeneutikk’ (likewise: *hermeneutics of method*).⁹⁸ Although this last distinction tends to conflate the comprehension inherent in textual interpretation of particular works with a more general understanding, it illustrates that hermeneutics can serve several purposes. Interpretation is an activity which takes place in many different levels, or within many dimensions of our lives and experiences, and also with regard to our relations to self, other and reality. Both Jeanrond’s and Henriksen’s distinctions correspond quite closely to the Ricoeurian view to which I subscribe (as somewhat different to Gadamer), and will be

⁹⁶ Included in the idea of method, is therefore the *ethics of reading*. As subjective reader/interpreter of a text one must be aware of one’s own individual responsibility and susceptibility to illusion and mistaken assumptions. As we shall see later in the thesis, an important aspect of ethics is the concept of Character – in which the idea of “suspension of the ego” in relation to the Other is a fundamental aspect of phronesis, or moral wisdom. To ethical reading of text, see a short discussion in Jeanrond: *Theological Hermeneutics*, p 116-17. (The Chapter titled: “Towards an[d] ethics of reading”). In addition to the points made by Jeanrond, I am also indebted in this context to Wayne C. Booth and his insight in *The Company we Keep. An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley 1988. (His contribution has been to clarify the difference between the ethics of reading (such as developed by for instance J. Hillis-Miller) and the ethics of fiction.)

⁹⁷ Jeanrond: *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.4.

⁹⁸ See Henriksen: *Tegn, tekst, tolk*. p.16f.

of help to me later. Neither of the two quite explicate the place of technical skills of reading, however, but in the light of the previous discussions I find it unproblematic to see skills as being of less importance than these other, more overarching perspectives.

This last statement needs a short comment, which is important to the actual close readings and interpretations of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*: I shall not at any point in the thesis spend much time presenting the particular skills/tools which are instrumental to the methodological approach I take to the text. Suffice it to say here that although I mostly utilize traditional structuralist tools for analysis, I do not subscribe to the structuralist view that these tools guarantee a totalitarian or authoritative reading.⁹⁹ I also feel free to cross boundaries between different schools of textual interpretation. Semiotics, rhetoric and narratology in both structuralist and post-structuralist styles are all suppliers of skills to me, although none represent an ultimate or authoritative methodological approach with regard to my work. In short, my method involves a maximalist and hermeneutically informed study of the relation between different (more or less theoretical) perspectives, in which I ideally seek to hold forth and challenge several different voices that occur when reading. These voices are many, but most importantly that of Murdoch the author, those of fictional narrators and characters in the text, and my own voice. (This dynamic of voices is something I shall return to in Chapter 6.) In the occurring dialogue, I see myself as constantly playing with “imaginative variations of the ego”, which, according to Ricoeur, is a precondition for as far as possible to freeing myself as reader from any illusion that I can simply enter the meaning of a text.¹⁰⁰

5.3. Which Hermeneutics and Why?

Named after the Greek god of communication, Hermes, ‘hermeneutics’ is, in short, theory of interpretation. The field of hermeneutics is large, and has a long history which I will not discuss in detail, but only to the extent that the different positions are relevant to what I do. This chapter contains a presentation of central aspects of my understanding of what hermeneutics is and should be, which until now has been more or less presupposed in the text. There are many different approaches to how a process of interpretation and its goal are to be under-

⁹⁹ Such as they (at least to some extent) are presented in for instance the now classic works Chatman, Seymour: *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca/London 1978, and Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith: *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London/New York 1983, and recur in most text-books for literary analysis in studies of language and literature. Issues of perspective, voice, genre, narration, temporality, style, actants and so forth will all figure in my work, but I shall expect the reader to be familiar with them.

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p.95.

stood. Does it mean, as it can for certain hermeneuts, that the truth, or meaning, of a text or such is given and static, ultimately “there to be found” if one only can find the right interpretative tools? Or does it mean that different truths or meanings merge when they interact, becoming something new in the process, in a kind of Hegelian, forward-moving dialectic towards deeper insight? Or is the attainable level of truth in hermeneutics something which is fundamentally relative to “the other”? Such (somewhat caricatured) differences between hermeneutic traditions can partially be identified by paying attention to the questions: what is to be interpreted, who is the interpreter, and what is the aim for an interpretative process?

In hermeneutics, the object of interpretation can be manifold: reality as such, a written text, a person, a life narrative, and so forth. These are all instances which require interpretation in order for us to understand them. What is important, and a presupposition for all hermeneutic theories, is the acknowledgement that for the interpreting subject, there is *no direct access* to understanding the meaning of the object of interpretation. There is always a difference, a gap which must be bridged. Such gaps can, for instance, be the polarity of self (I) and other (you), of text and reader, or past and present. To state it more generally: anything that requires the interpreter in his or her quest for understanding to transcend (or fuse) what Gadamer refers to as the different horizons, must be subjected to hermeneutic reflection. There are, however, different degrees of optimism concerning the extent to which such fusion, or transcending of difference, can take place. Further, there are several ways of understanding what such fusion, or transcendence, actually involves. To a large extent, the various opinions on these matters have to do with the range of understandings of plurality, or difference, inherent in the situation: is the difference illusive, dichotomic or radical? Hermeneutic traditions can be identified as subscribing to dissimilar understandings of difference.

I shall now first provide some rough reflections on core sets of understanding difference, partially by use of metaphors. Following this (and some further reflections on the relation between interpreting subject and the object of interpretation), I shall in the next chapter place the position by which this study is informed within the context of different models of *theological* hermeneutics. In the following description of three attitudes to difference, I shall to make some broad, sweeping points. In doing this, I know that subtleties will be lost. However, an intention in Part II (in general as well as in the following passages) is not to argue my position negatively by proving a given position to be inadequate, but *positively* by showing in what manner my approach can be fruitful, and be a significant voice in the discussion of moral au-

thority. Therefore, some degree of (not untruthful) exaggeration is helpful as a framework for approaching the radical understanding of difference on which I base my hermeneutic theory.

The first alternative is in reality a *monistic* understanding of difference. In other words, difference is an illusion. It is seen as negative – something which obscures the objective and ultimate truth. The authority by which truth is held, is seen as given, either by God, or is otherwise ontologically fixed. Different interpretations of truth are thus seen to occur because of misunderstandings, or lack of knowledge or insight. The Biblical metaphoric story of Babel represents a classic image of this negative attitude to difference: Babel symbolizes “worldly” confusion. Lack of direct understanding is something to be countered, or transcended. In consequence, the hermeneutic process (if it in fact can be called such) is to strip the object of the interpretation of its idiosyncratic, historical or particular “truths” in order to lay bare the ultimate truth as far as possible. Such a position on the nature of difference easily ends up as being foundationalist and orthodox, where interpretation is just instrumental to discovering and uncovering what is seen to be *the truth*.

The second alternative understanding of difference can be characterized as formalist. A deep vein in modern theory has at its root a *dual* understanding of difference. Both reality and our cognition of reality are fundamentally structured by binary oppositions which mutually exclude and define each other. (Light is *not dark*, I am *not you*.) Dichotomies structure reality. Truth can be obtained by a methodological search for seeing how differences form patterns of meaning, for instance as in the positions held by logical positivists or structuralists. An approach to hermeneutics that has such an image of difference at its heart, will respond to truth as something that is under continuous development as the different positions synthesize into new patterns of insight. (Gadamer is too complex a thinker to fit easily into this simplistic description of modernist formalism, but he nevertheless sees difference as something to be overcome by paying attention to the new insight formed by fusion of horizons.)

The third alternative understanding of difference (which I find to be a useful extension to the others), is perspectivist, relational and fundamentally *pluralistic*. It is thus more radical than the understanding based on Levi-Straussian binary oppositions discussed above. Difference *can* be apparent or resolvable, but this position also takes into view that there are instances of incommensurable aspects of reality. The hermeneut who has as her cognitive basis such an understanding of difference, sees the hermeneutic process as one in which the primary goal is not for the horizons to “fuse”, nor for difference to be transcended, but where it is precisely in the dynamic (but not dual) structure of difference that meaning is found. Words such as

‘meaning’ and ‘truth’ make sense only in the interaction, tension or dialogue (metaphorically speaking) between incommensurable difference. Not opposition, but paradox and ambivalence are thus key words. Further, I am not myself *in contrast* to you, but – as it is said in many African countries: ‘Ubuntu’ – “I am because you are”. It is precisely this structure of *relationships* between differences that constitutes the understanding of (relational) reality and anthropology which I subscribe to. An image which can illustrate the difference of focus between a dual understanding of difference and a relationalist one, is that of an electric battery: the positive and negative pole are not of particular interest as such, but the *current* that is created as inherent in their difference. When brought together, the tension between positive and negative brings something entirely new into being. It is the light that shines which is of interest. It is the energy caused by the incommensurable and ambivalent that is important, and which contributes to my discussion of moral authority.

I have now drawn attention to some different images of difference between interpreter and the interpreted. But what does this mean in practice? The main point I wish to stress, is that I do not see the meaning of the object of interpretation as carrier of a given or essential truth which the subject is to discover. The subject of the interpretative act is contextually situated and constructed, and therefore is *part of* constituting the meaning of the object. (Ubuntu – “I am because you are” – necessarily represents a historically situated and mutually constructive understanding of both the “I” and the “you”.) Thus, the subject fundamentally stands in an interactive, dynamic relation with that which is to be understood. Further, the truth of a matter does not lie primarily either with the object, or in the interpreting subject’s perspective. Thus, neither object nor subject has primacy in this respect – something which is easily visualized in the context of two (active) persons talking to each other. (More so than in a relation between for instance (passive) text and (active) reader, which, of course, is the most common relation in this piece of work.) In both cases, however, both subject and object are destabilized in their interaction with the other. Any involved reader gives new meaning to a classical text, while she in turn can experience a change in her perspectives as a result of the suspension of own truths in relation to the text.

The truth, or meaning that can be sought in hermeneutics as I understand it, is thus fundamentally a relational and dynamic construction – in a deeper, more intertwined sense than structural unities of binary oppositions. It is to be seen as something that lies “beyond” the present, as a potentiality inherent in a given relation. This goal can never be reached. It is always unfinalized – a point made by both Ricoeur and Bakhtin. However, such an attitude to truth does

not mean that one cannot hold something to be closer to the truth than something else at a given stage in time or space. An important aspect of such an approach to understanding, is that ultimate truths are suspended, but not discarded. Relating to and responding to the different perspectives inherent in a pluralistic situation does not therefore necessarily lead to a conclusion that all is relative. A hermeneutic approach to the quest for understanding retains the possibility that one can arguably and critically hold one thing to be truer than something else, provided such truth is humbly held and that one always sees it as open for revision.

5.4. A Hermeneutic Position on Theology and Multidisciplinarity

The multidisciplinary nature of this study fundamentally represents an important aspect of the hermeneutic approach developed above: that it is in the dynamic interaction between the (sometimes) incommensurable differences of (moral) philosophy, literary criticism and theology/theological ethics that the problem of moral authority can rise to the surface and be treated in the manner I propose. Some further comments on my approach to handling the relation between these three main fields is necessary. I do this by referring to some reflections on differing views on how to understand the relation between theological and non-theological perspectives on the interpretation of reality. Jeanrond identifies three quite different paradigms of hermeneutics in contemporary theology, which are helpful to my argument. Further, the strategies are not only relevant to understanding different paradigms of theological hermeneutics, but will also prove to be helpful in examining different approaches to ethics, both secular and theological.

As far as the significance of hermeneutics is concerned there are then at present three camps in Christian theology. (1) There are those Christian thinkers like Tracy, Küng, and Berger who favour an open-ended dialogue on method between Christian interpreters and other thinkers interested in hermeneutics. Generally speaking, they wish to assess the particular Christian vision for this world in the context of a great conversation with all other groups of human thinkers who care for the people of the world and for the universe in which we live. (2) There are those Christian thinkers like Stuhlmacher, Lindbeck and the late Hans Frei who feel that they ought to determine the specifically Christian vision predominantly from inside the church and biblical theology. (...) Both groups agree on the need for interpretation theory, but only the first group is willing to be engaged radically in the hermeneutical reflection on its methodological foundations. (...) And finally (3) there are those Christian thinkers who call again for an 'orthodox' approach to the Scriptures (...) divine revelation does not need human methods or philosophical sophistication to do its job successfully.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Jeanrond: *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.163.

These paradigms broadly correspond (in reversed order) to the distinction above between three approaches to hermeneutics on the basis of different understandings of difference (or plurality). The point here is to show how different interpretations of the role of hermeneutics in theology give access to three different models for understanding multidisciplinary. The “open-ended dialogue” is a key phrase concerning the first of the three paradigms, and included in the dialogue are theologians and other thinkers. Such a project corresponds well with what I am doing in this piece of work. With respect to the earlier introduced distinction between macro- and micro-hermeneutics, the first model enters a macro-level of hermeneutic intention, while the second sees interpretation as important, but only as instrumental to understanding constructions or visions of truth within a community, thus being a micro-hermeneutic paradigm.¹⁰² One can, in my opinion, therefore distinguish between a hermeneutic theology (Tracy et al) and theological hermeneutics (Lindbeck et al). Thus, a hermeneutic theology will acknowledge that an *interpretation of culture* (in a wider sense than within Christian churches and cultures) is necessary to develop theology further – and not only in a “technical” sense in order to understand Scripture and the doctrines better (Lindbeck).¹⁰³

So, to recap what bearing this has on my work: first and foremost, I argue that although the thesis is fundamentally a study in theological ethics, the scope is actually most of the time that of non-theological moral philosophy and literature. Subscribing to the Tracy-tradition of hermeneutics in the sense above, the field in which I discuss theological issues as a theologian, is therefore often not quite recognizable as such, at least not with regard to which texts and subject-matters the theological hermeneut or orthodox theologian traditionally interacts. At a macro-level of hermeneutic theology, the primary place for the present discussion of moral authority is in the context of reading literature as part of a dialogue with both philosophy and theology. At a micro-level of interpretation, I use tools for reading the text from several different disciplines, which enables me to enter a dynamic and polyphonic dialogue and thus, in Ricoeur’s words: to “unrealise myself” on the way to deeper insight.

One cannot convincingly argue any ethical case or build any ethical theory on the basis on a pre-supposed transcendent reality. The eventual possibility of speaking about transcendent reality can only take place in a process of destabilizing, or at least challenging, the conditions for it, the necessity of which I argued in Part I. Critical theology thus “frames” the non-

¹⁰² This point will resurface in a critique of the narrative ethicist Stanley Hauerwas in Part V, Chapter 13.4.

¹⁰³ Jeanrond: *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.163.

theological approach, but I stress that precisely the engagement with other voices which culture (in a wide sense) provides is a fundamental aspect of working with theology. Such difference is therefore neither within nor in opposition to a theological perspective, but in dialogue with it. The inherent cultural relativizations and juxtapositions of a multidisciplinary approach thus deepen and expand the scope of theology, and serve as a ground for discussing the authority of moral concepts in a manner relevant to the contemporary situation.

5.5. My Voice as Hermeneutic Theologian: Outlining a Position

For a hermeneutic dialogue such as that which I have argued for above to be viable, it is necessary to be aware that the voice with which I speak is culturally embedded. In my case, one such cultural conditioning which must be as transparent as possible is that I am trained as a theologian (or something close to it).¹⁰⁴ It would be an illusion to believe that my points of view are not relevant to what I do as an academic. The aim and purpose of theology is to discuss and critically evaluate human interpretations of God's reality, not to presume to speak about God's reality *as such*. Thus, I do not see theology as necessarily relating closely to faith. Theology as discipline does not, in my opinion, mean that the theologian must be a believer herself. The subject matter of theology is nevertheless that of reality seen in the light of human faith in God as the creator and sustainer of this reality. Part of the contextual sensitivity I believe to be necessary in academic work, and which conditions my interpretation of the subject matter of theology, involves acknowledging myself as a person: I am a youngish Norwegian, Christian woman. Therefore, the theological work I do must necessarily differ from what an old Molvanian atheist man might do.¹⁰⁵ I must, however, enter into a (Ricoeurian) process of suspicion towards what biases I bring with such a background into the discourse.

As a contextually orientated theologian speaking about conditions for understanding interpretations of Christian faith and moral life in the present intellectual climate (a task I presented in Part I), one faces two very different conceptions of reality which are involved in and are relevant to such a process. On the one hand, a presupposition of the faith that is studied in context is that ultimately, all reality is sustained by God – and this is part of that which must be chal-

¹⁰⁴ My degree is actually in Christianity-studies based in the field of Arts, not Divinity as such. However, I do identify myself with the work done by theologians around the world, and certainly see this project as part of a theological discourse.

¹⁰⁵ For a more thorough introduction to what a Molvanian perspective on theology might involve, see for instance: Cilauro, Santo, Tom Gleisner and Rob Sitch: *Molvania: A Land Untouched by Modern Dentistry*. Sydney 2004.

lenged. However, although as a theologian one must engage critically with such presuppositions of faith, one cannot discount the fact that this constitutes, for the believer, the “frame of the picture” concerning interpretations of reality. As a contextual theologian, therefore, one can, as well as ought to, see humanity, ecclesiology and ethics in the light of this.

On the other hand, theologians also need to acknowledge that it is not only the Christian fellowship which represents the context of theoretical reflection. It is one among many within which the individual constitutes his or her identity. A fundamentally other perspective, or point of departure from a theological one, must therefore be that of human life reality seen through experience and reason within the cultural context of all humanity, not just that of the Christian Church. This context is, whether or not one believes in God, that of a pluralistic situation (informed at least in part by postmodern criticism), which makes it impossible to universally and meaningfully presuppose the reality of God. Any ethical reflection about how to live must therefore include the human experience that faith in the reality of God can be, and often is, challenged. I cannot utterly transcend my own world view and interpretations of reality, although I can and must be suspicious of my own and others’ “truths”.

For my discussion of moral authority and theological ethics it is not advisable, nor possible, to harmonize these points of entry in a simple unitary model. This is the paradox of theology as an academic discipline, and that which makes relational hermeneutics of such fundamental importance for its self-understanding. Thus, without a critical reflection of the total difference between theological and non-theological perspectives, both approaches will fall into the trap of considering the other view as secondary.

5.6. In Anticipation of Further Perspectives on Theory and Method...

a) Paul Ricoeur and his Work in the Thesis’s Context

Ricoeurian hermeneutics provides, as seen above, a theoretical framework to this thesis. This, in turn, includes methodological perspectives on my reading of Murdoch’s texts. Both aspects influence the discussion of moral authority. In Part IV, I shall explicitly bring his ethical hermeneutics into this discussion. The context for the dialogue will by then have been established through my reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. This is important, as it will enable me to concentrate on substantial considerations of the problem. Otherwise, the discussion might remain formal and decontextualised, which would be counter to my theoretical position. One could, however, argue that as this is a section of the thesis that specifically deals with theoretical perspectives, I ought to give Ricoeur more attention at this stage. And yes, I

could have done that.¹⁰⁶ However, as argued above, I have chosen to enter the literary analysis as early as possible, in order to underscore the importance of the novel as my primary material. However, it might be helpful to give to a reader a few words about what is to come.

The primary focus in Part IV will on Ricoeur's contribution to the way in which we speak about and handle complexity and ambivalence regarding both anthropology and moral language. His pluralistic (not dual) understanding of difference contributes to the position he establishes, to which I am sympathetic. Concerning the first of the operative questions as presented in the thesis's Chapter 2,¹⁰⁷ it is helpful to see and discuss how Ricoeur handles the integration of issues such as language, power and agency in what he calls a "hermeneutics of selfhood". A specific reason why Ricoeur has proved to be helpful with respect to the present problem field is that he relates the above issues very clearly to a *narrative* understanding of anthropology, understanding and ethics. This he explicitly discusses with reference to literary text as a "place" for development of the level of truth attainable in hermeneutics – which is a discussion with great relevance to the problem of the authority of moral language.

b) Mikhail M. Bakhtin and his Work in the Thesis's Context

While Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides structures for understanding complex reality, and is therefore helpful on what often is quite an abstract level, the work of Bakhtin sheds further light on the manner in which Murdoch develops moral concepts in her novels. His work too, however, will also be discussed in Part IV and not here. A short introduction is nevertheless in place. Bakhtin has written a poetics of the novel that is concretely applicable to my readings of Murdoch. I will concentrate on certain aspects of his perception of the *dialogic, polyphonic novel*.¹⁰⁸ His deep metaphors of voices, language and dialogue provide help in seeing Mur-

¹⁰⁶ Readers are certainly welcome to read Part IV at this stage, if they wish. There are benefits to this, in that my interpretations of both Ricoeur and Bakhtin, which I explicate in more detail there, have influenced my reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. To read Part IV now might clarify some of the interpretative focus in the close reading. However, I do not explicitly engage in dialogue with these thinkers until in Part V, and have therefore chosen to postpone their entrance to the discussion. I also wish to remind readers that the text of a thesis must necessarily be linear, whereas the process of a study such as this is nothing like that. Therefore, as the present text itself is a presentation of a complex, non-linear interpretive process, it must include choices concerning its design which could have been different as to where a topic, discussion or conclusion is introduced.

¹⁰⁷ "What makes us convinced as to what is truly good and evil, and what gives us the motivation to live (act) in accordance to such conviction?"

¹⁰⁸ I will refer to the concept of 'polyphony' several times before I discuss it in further depth in Part IV. Suffice it to say at this stage, is that it means "many voices". Further, Bakhtin is probably as well known for his concept of 'carnival' as of polyphony and dialogue. This will not be thematised to any large extent.

doch's novelistic technique clearly and critically, and give access to particular characters and concrete voices in the discourse. Secondly, Bakhtin's work also gives access to a fruitful discussion of Murdoch's point that literature and philosophy provide the necessary different languages by which we speak about complex reality and morality. This material is thus not only helpful as an analytical tool to the literary analysis, but also with regard to the manner in which I handle the hermeneutic, or in the present case, dialogic, relationship between the two genres of Murdoch's work – i.e. philosophical as well as literary texts.

At this stage the following question must be asked: how ought one to classify Bakhtin's literary theory? Is it possible to see his dialogics of the novel as a hermeneutic theory (or method)? The philosophical role of his theories in contemporary theory of interpretation should not be underestimated. The concept of 'dialogue' is, of course, not only his, but his contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of dialogue has been very important in the context of hermeneutic theory. Bakhtin's work is somewhat confusing, as it at first glance can seem to be primarily methodologically orientated, although its actual significance is probably greater as theory. There are obviously structural similarities between dialogism and hermeneutics, particularly because that inherent in the idea of multivoicedness, language and dialogue, lies the act of interpretation across a gap.

Finally, both Ricoeur and Bakhtin see meaning as something unfinalized. Meaning and truth cannot be found by use of a certain procedures, but occur in the complex relations between self and other, sameness and difference, appearance and reality, and the internal and the external.¹⁰⁹ However, with respect to the relation between literature and reality, it is important to be aware that a reader and a text are not voices as such, although the concept of different voices is an apt metaphor of the central elements of a dialogic process. There is a power-distortion (active-passive) between them, and such dialogue is not necessarily an adequate image of all aspects of a hermeneutically informed interpretation of text. The difference between Bakhtin as methodologist on the one hand and theorist on the other, can help us to distinguish between different aspects of the concepts of voice and dialogue. All in all, it is not uncommon to refer to Bakhtin's work of literary criticism as important texts with regard to theoretical discourse on hermeneutics. I shall leave the question rather open, and hold that a sharp definition of "what" Bakhtin's work "is", is not of fundamental importance. And I do not refer directly to Bakhtin as a hermeneut. However, what is important, is that I use his

¹⁰⁹ We shall see that these four verbal "doublets" will occur increasingly during the thesis.

framework to establish a hermeneutic approach to the work of Iris Murdoch, to the problem of moral authority, and to theological ethics.

5.7. Summary: Hermeneutics as a Journey of Detour and Dialogue

The macro-hermeneutical approach to theology and philosophy represents a mode of consciousness, not a method. It is integral to the way of thinking about ethics, truth, meaning and knowledge that I advocate in this work. My use of Bakhtinian metaphors of multi-voicedness and dialogue as a means of understanding how to speak about, know of and learn moral concepts, illustrates this: hermeneutics involves, as does dialogue, a motion of stepping towards in order to listen to and focus on what the individual voices say, and also a stepping back to an analytic distance in order to understand the pluralist totality of meaning that arises from the voices' juxtaposition and interplay. Concretely, this can for instance mean that when I study the characters of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* from a text-internal micro-hermeneutic perspective, I listen to the many particular voices of the novel and reflect on their interaction in order to destabilize given authority in a hierarchical sense concerning moral concepts such as 'good' and 'evil'. However, in order not to do this in a manner which leads to reductive answers to the main problem, the literary perspective needs to be transcended by approaching it with questions from a wider philosophical and theological discourse.

The point with which I wish to conclude this presentation of theoretical perspective, is precisely that hermeneutics gives access to speak about the incommensurability of the close and the distant, the particular and universal, the contextual and the ideal – at the same time as acknowledging that all perspectives give necessary insight into aspects of the complexity of human life morality, and further, that our attempts to understand morality, must always allow for other voices to be heard. Fundamentally, hermeneutics takes a pluralistic and perspectivist approach to truth-claims, and is, in the words of Ricoeur, a "philosophy of detour"¹¹⁰. Similarly, dialogue differs from monologue precisely *because* of its detours. A dialogue cannot easily be visualized as moving forwards in a straight line, rather, its development zigzags, or spirals, between those who utter their points of view. This corresponds too to the design of the study, as presented in Part I. The difference of voices, including the contexts, languages and perspectives they represent, is therefore integral to the notion of dialogue. This thesis, and the approach to the literary and philosophical material, the method and central problem, is constructed following such a logic of detour and dialogue.

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur: *Oneself as Another*, p.19 (among other places).

6. The Methodological Background to the Literary Analysis

6.1. Authority, Form and Content

Through Part I and so far in Part II, several foundations for the forthcoming literary analysis have been laid. First and foremost the problem of moral authority has been introduced. What gives moral language its authority? What do words, or concepts, like ‘good’ or ‘evil’ mean, and how can they be known, understood and used? Secondly, I have argued for the benefits of a literary-hermeneutic approach to the discussion. However, there are several problems that now must be confronted. For instance, questions which are central to the field of literary criticism become particularly challenging when the borderline for what usually belongs in this field is under pressure.¹¹¹ What are the theoretical arguments for (and against) reading novels as part of philosophical and theological discourse? What will the actual role of literary analysis be in the forthcoming discussion of the central problem? In this chapter I shall first defend my chosen methodological approach to analysis. In short, it consists of a double movement – a move towards seeking aspects of *form*, structure, unity and meaning in the novels, yet also a move towards focusing on the idiosyncratic aspects of characters, images, and actions particular to the *content* of the novels. I then move on to discuss and clarify my position on certain aspects of theories of metaphor and mimesis in literature and beyond, although these discussions are not extensive. In a logical progression from this, I finally present my understanding of the relation between author, text and reader in a methodological structure I have called “relational readings”.

6.2. Literary Criticism: A Quest for Ideology or Idiosyncrasy?

Technically, the analysis of the novel in Part III and particularly in Part V, will be done in part by use of structuralist tools for literary criticism, supplemented by elements from Ricoeurian perspectives on narrative and metaphor and by Bakhtinian poetics. However, the present analysis differs from the majority of the work done within the diverse field of literary criticism, in that the analysis is not a goal *in itself*. I do not imply that such analysis would be less worthy of interest, but the context of the present study provides me with a different intention. I approach the novels seeking new and hopefully better words and models by which to speak about certain ethical problems. Hence, the analysis is in a certain sense a means to a different end, and is part of a wider discourse than one singularly internal to literary criticism. It is thus

¹¹¹ An important reference book and background to my understanding of literary theory, is Eagleton, Terry: *Literary Theory. An Introduction*. Oxford 1983/1996.

not purely a study of literary text as such, but also of ideas within and around the novels. This is, however, potentially a hazardous project, and is open to disagreement.

The discussion on the relationship between form and content is complex. There is a long tradition in modern literary criticism for being strongly sceptical about all ideological reading, in which form is seen as a “wrapping” which transport certain ideas from author to reader. Simply stated, giving *form* priority to *content*, belongs to the modernist ideal of textual objectivity. Hard-core structuralists and formalists therefore insist that there are and must be strict rules for analysis, and that to seek meaning which transcends the form of the text is a speculative and subjectivist endeavour. Critics from such traditions might for instance complain that I force my readings by way of an already formed idea of what I am looking for, and thus read things into the text which are not necessarily there, for instance moral values. A further, related aspect of this, is that the novel might seem to be given second priority in relation to the moral philosophical problem I am discussing, and is thus not valued for its own merit.

My first point of defence would be to say that the different levels of discussion are not in any way to be seen as hierarchical. The novels are not to be understood as illustrations of abstract ideas, nor is the philosophy to be understood as distilled from the novels. It is necessary to understand that this project is about ways in which to approach problems of being a thinking, feeling and acting human being from several different points of entry, thus opening up to other ways of understanding life than what is possible by use of a single tradition or language, or by listening to a single “voice”. Thus, in Bakhtinian terminology, the relationship between philosophy, literature and theology is understood to be profoundly heteroglossic. Therefore, objectivity in literary analysis becomes an impossibility. The languages and structures of thought which the different traditions represent, constantly serve to juxtapose and relativize the others, thus making it necessary to adopt a humble approach to the degree of objectivity and finality of any given answers.

Critics from another point of view might react to what can be seen as the grandiosity of the present quest. Deconstructionists (here lumped together rather indiscriminately) would insist that the direction of analysis must *not* be towards seeking some form of unity between the different genres and traditions, but that it should search for the plurality of fragments of textual evidence that human life and its meaning is contingent, and can never transcend the references internal to a subjective and particular sphere. I do agree that it is an important aspect of criticism to deconstruct the grand narratives of theology, philosophy and literature in order to make transparent the power they have. I also adhere to the deconstructionists’ focus on per-

spective-awareness and stressing the importance of complex intertextuality and contextuality. Nevertheless, I still think that any quest for understanding human life reality must follow a double, or even pluralist road in the same sense as above. Thus, the answer to those who would say that this project is too naïve an attempt to seek unity, referentiality and universal meaning – is the same as to those who would criticise the present attempt for lack of objectivity.

There is a real danger that turning to such pluralistic answers is a cheap and simple way out of dilemmas and real theoretical problems or dichotomies. One cannot always have one's cake and eat it too. Nevertheless, I believe it to be the most appropriate response to the challenges I experience when trying to "do" ethics, and certainly more appropriate than the formal and rationalistic either/or-thinking which has had such a long tradition in academia. Iris Murdoch says of such double thinking: "There is a two-way movement in philosophy, a movement towards the building of elaborate theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts."¹¹² Such a two-way movement I would say also exists when crossing strict disciplinary barriers, and would apply equally to the movements *between* as well as *within* philosophy, literature and theological enquiry. Further, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of self has such a double movement as its deepest foundation. However, he emphasises more strongly than Murdoch that the two are incommensurable, yet fundamentally important to each other. Bakhtin uses yet a different image, or terminology, for what is more or less the same. He speaks about "centrifugal" and "centripetal" forces in the quest to understand human existence.¹¹³ The centrifugal leads towards the inclusion of more and more voices – for instance particular characters in a novel with their subjectivity, and goes in the direction of chaos. The opposite, centripetal forces can for instance be found in the artist's attempt to represent reality by giving it unity, or form, which helps to make sense of the chaotic. Both are necessary – and, importantly, integral to the ideal novel, the polyphonic novel – the "baggy monster" of art.

6.3. The Novel – Transcending and Mirroring Reality

'Metaphor' and 'mimesis' are concepts which have their roots deeply embedded in the field of aesthetic interpretation. Both are extremely complex, in usage as well as meaning, and are to be found in vastly differentiated theoretical arenas. Metaphor in particular has a large scope

¹¹² Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.1.

¹¹³ Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Austin USA 1981 (1st published 1965-1975: translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist.), p.271-273.

in contemporary theory. In its strict sense, metaphor means “Figure of speech in which a word or expression normally used of one kind of object, action etc. is extended to another.”¹¹⁴ In a wider sense, metaphor theories are about understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. The word ‘mimesis’, on the other hand, meaning “imitation” or “representation”, is not much used outside the fields of literary criticism and aesthetic theory. However, it represents a problem with widespread relevance, namely the question of whether or not text is seen as an imitation of reality (whatever that is) or not. If a text *is* seen as imitation, the next question becomes *how* such imitative representation is valued. Is it untrue because it is “not the real thing”, or does a representation make so-called reality accessible? Or is it in fact impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is representation? And finally, how is the imitated ‘reality’ to be understood?

Metaphor and mimesis are both conceptually important at two distinct levels of the present study. On the one hand, they belong within the poetics of the novel, and are methodologically central to the actual study of the novels. On the other hand, both terms are useful in dealing with the relation between literature and what is experienced as ‘the real world’, as indicated above. Thus they are both helpful in transcending the border between the academic disciplines of literary criticism and philosophy/theology, without breaking inherent rules of the traditions. Although they are not synonymous concepts, both have at a deep level to do with referential and representational issues of language. Both are therefore helpful in facing the epistemological challenge which the distinction between fact and fiction implies when it comes to discussions of the authority of moral concepts. It is easy to assume that a fact is true, and that fiction by nature is *not* true. However, theories of metaphor and mimesis provide alternative approaches to such a rigid distinction. Thus, they contribute to bridging the gap between dealing with fictional novels on one hand, to abstract discussions of moral language on the other. I will not spend much time discussing the issue of mimesis yet, as it will be thematised in the context of Bakhtin’s discourse of the novel. To anticipate this, however, he stresses that literature is *represented reality*.¹¹⁵ For Bakhtin, there is a certain relation between ‘reality’ and literature, and the appropriate metaphor by which to understand this relation is that of *voice* (not, as in many other theories of mimesis, a mirror). It is important, therefore, that ‘reality’ is *represented* by the *voice of the author*, and is therefore not directly accessible. I subscribe to Bakhtin in this, and although a more sophisticated discussion of mimesis could

¹¹⁴ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*, Oxford University Press 1997.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Part IV, Ch.10.3.

be held (particularly with reference to Ricoeur and his extensive discussions of this in *Time and Narrative*), I shall leave it at that.

The concept of metaphor must be commented upon both with reference to macro and micro aspects of the hermeneutic investigation at hand. The immense popularity of the concept of metaphor in contemporary academia is overwhelming. Traditionally, metaphor has belonged in the context of rhetorics, and in textual interpretation (for instance in Biblical studies). It has therefore always been a very important tool of literary theory. During the Twentieth Century, particularly via linguistics and psychology, it has been adopted in almost all branches of academic theory.¹¹⁶ The explosion of the use of metaphor theory in academia is a classic example of what can happen when a model of thought is transferred from one context to another, opening up to new vistas of understanding, thus proving itself to be a useful model of how conceptions and understandings change.

I cannot here provide a comprehensive introduction to metaphor theory, as the scope is too large. There are, however, some points which must be made. The first has to do with the actual study of metaphor as literary device in the novels. There is a simple level in which I study metaphors as a form of illustration. For instance, the character Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is often compared to a bird, more or less directly. Sometimes she is identified with a bird, and at other times there are *references* to birds which are clearly relevant to an analysis of Morgan. A more complex view of metaphor (as mentioned above) is one in which metaphor is seen to structure our conceptual frameworks. This is important in my work, and is inspired by Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theories of the 1980's. They understood metaphor as "a general pattern in which one domain is systematically conceived and spoken of in terms of another"¹¹⁷. One aspect of this which is relevant to the wider horizon of the relation between literature and philosophy/theology, is that the domain which for a very long time has systematically structured philosophical thought and speech, is that of mathematics and logic. Using narrative, imaginative and poetic images from the domain of literature, our philosophical conceptions can change radically, and they have begun to do so as part of the critique of modernity.

In the wake of such a view of metaphor, one aspect of my analysis concerns what happens when the characters and their narratives are "conceived of and spoken of in terms of another

¹¹⁶ A classic work on this is Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson: *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago 1980 (1st ed.).

¹¹⁷ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistic*.

(narrative)". The most important of such interactions are perhaps with the Bible, works by Shakespeare, and Plato's story of the cave from *The Republic*¹¹⁸. These are all used as inter-textual references and are deeply embedded as metaphoric structures in the novel. The novel provides new settings for these texts, posing them as "other" to the novel. In their new contexts, the references to and presence of the "external" narratives, can expand the interpretation of both text and intertext. The two stories can be understood in terms of each other, thus providing creative space in which new meaning can emerge. This rests on an assumption that not only a single image, but whole and complex narratives can be seen as metaphor. This understanding of metaphor as transcending single images is developed by Ricoeur, and is important as a premise for the present study.¹¹⁹ For instance, the dynamic of images in the novel such as cave-like spaces, turning around and light/darkness can best be understood when seen in light of the whole set of images which Plato's allegory represents. Thereby the potential power of particular metaphors is extended.

The initial background to the forthcoming literary analysis, was the insight above: that it is possible to interpret one character's story as metaphor in the sense that whole narratives carry meanings which point beyond the actual content of the given story. By reading narrative as metaphor, whole stories thus can become a means to create a new and deeper understanding of moral language. This is still relevant to the analysis, but rather than focusing singularly on the narrative structure of the good character in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, which would involve a predetermination of the good character Tallis's "value", I have found that studying the relationships between the characters, and bringing these images and stories into another and different discourse, the literary models generate creative and informative insight. Thus the novel in general, and the characters' stories in particular, can be of conceptual importance to philosophical or theological reflection, as the stories are inherently understood to be more than just illustrations of abstract ideas.

Novels, with their (more or less) mimetic function and literary language rich in metaphor, generate knowledge about human life reality by way of a different kind of logic than that traditionally available to philosophers. Ambiguity, multiplicity and uncertainty are all accepted as meaningful within an interpretation of a novel. For a modern philosopher, clarity and unambiguity have been fundamental values. My intention is to find a way in which the true

¹¹⁸ Plato: *The Republic*, Book VII (p. 312-315).

¹¹⁹ Ricoeur, Paul: *Time and Narrative Vol I-III*, Chicago and London 1984, 1985 and 1988 (1st eds. 1983, 1984 and 1985: *Temps et Récit*. Vol I and II translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol III translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer.). Vol III, p.3.

complexity of ethical problems, and the language available with which to speak about them, can be dealt with in philosophical discourse. The intention is to avoid falling prey to the reductionism which often occurs when the problems of real life are forced into the strict formulas of modern moral philosophy.

To conclude these reflections on metaphor and mimesis, I hold that literature studies do give access to critical thought on issues of subjectivity, relationality, ethics and the moral life. My premise is therefore that it is possible to study literary texts as places in which both the author and reader reflect on certain segments of human life reality in order to understand it better. I also believe that literature is neither more nor less valuable than philosophical reflection, but that the two supplement each other by way of *exchanging images* – with all the benefits shown by metaphor theorists, and thereby open up new vistas of possible insight.

6.4. The Many Voices of a Novel: A Relational (Polyphonic) Reading

In the following chapter, I shall outline the perspectives which have informed the methodological approach to the literary analysis. It is inspired by Bakhtin's dialogic theory of the novel, particularly with respect to the value I place on all the 'many voices' (polyphony) present in a process of interpretation of literary text. It is also an attempt to make use of important insights from within many of the different traditions of literary criticism which have dominated the Twentieth Century. These have had different points of departure: a novel has a certain background, and can be studied from a historical point of view. Or the novel is seen as an independent textual unit, which must be studied as such. Yet another approach to interpretation brings an awareness of the particular context (or rather, several different particular contexts) in which a novel is received. Such interpretative perspectives on literary texts have been focused on at different stages of modern literary criticism (more or less following a chronological line): from author via text to reader.

My aim here is to argue for a methodological approach that can help me to avoid reducing the present reading to *one* of these perspectives. My argument is that reading is in a deep sense a relational activity even if it is performed while physically alone. Such relationality can be articulated by use of polyphony as metaphor. When we read a novel, many different represented voices are relevant to our interpretations. The novel is therefore dependent on several kinds of interpersonal relations. The people whose voices are involved are both factual and fictional. One is the real *author*. Others are the *characters* and usually a *narrator*. The last is the *reader* (or rather, *readers*). None of these can be ignored (or, metaphorically speaking,

overheard) when analyzing a novel. They belong “behind”, “within” and “in front of” the text, and must be interpreted interactively. Yet they need to be kept distinct from each other in order for us to be able to critically handle different aspects of the text. I shall develop my argument a little further with respect to the literary analyses I do in the thesis.

The first perspective of reading is from “behind” the text, with respect to the relation between the author Iris Murdoch and the characters she creates in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. The creation of characters in the imagination is a complex process. On one hand the characters will all reflect Murdoch’s own mental projections. On the other hand, authors often state that the characters take on their own lives while being written – as does Murdoch. The author is thus not completely “in control” of her characters, and they often carry meaning that the author had not intended. Such a relationship between author and characters implies a double approach in any attempt to comment on Murdoch’s philosophy through analysis of her novels. For while it is possible, sometimes, to recognize Murdoch’s thought and her mental world by analysing the structure, metaphors or characters, the opposite is just as (or even more) often true. We cannot simply derive philosophy from literature. They are linguistic and conceptual worlds apart. However, neither can we ignore the fact that the world we are reading about is the figment of one person’s imagination. In this case, it is the imagination of a person who is also a philosopher. The relationship between author and work is often reduced to an “either/or” in analysis. It is true that Murdoch’s voice can occasionally be discerned in the novel, and that this might well be relevant to the analysis. On the other hand, however, it is *also* true and important that literature creates something new. A novel has meaning unknown to the author. Therefore, the relationship between author and text needs to be read with an awareness of the doubleness: there is both closeness *and* distance between author and text. It is impossible to reduce analysis to identification *or* alienation with respect to this relationship.

A second, different aspect of relationality/polyphony is that which we can find *within the text itself*. My argument in the present study is that moral ideas or concepts are given substantial content in the *interaction* between the novel’s characters. What is primarily and morally relevant in my reading of Murdoch’s novel lies in the dynamic relation between what she herself sees as metaphysic, transcendent ideals (or concepts) and human context (or action). My interest in the relationships between the characters can therefore be illustrated by help of the following questions with which I approach the text: how is this (Murdochian) doubleness concerning, for instance, good and evil, embodied in the narrative? In what sense can we recognize such ideas in the characters? Are they “true”? I try to show that it is as the characters

come into being, and “live” their lives in their relationships, that the substantial content, and thus, authority of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in this particular novel, gradually becomes apparent.

A third perspective of the interaction between the voices involved with respect to a novel, concerns the relation between text and reader. As several different reader response theories have stressed, the meaning of a text is created in the hermeneutic dynamic between text and reader.¹²⁰ Every reader is unique, and will therefore create images, generate ideas and produce meaning that necessarily differs from that of another reader. The differences are many: culture, gender, religion, own life narrative, generation etc. The intertextual references will never be the same for two readers. Thereby discrepancy in meaning arises. When reading and analysing the novel, I include my own associations, and bring myself far into the process of interpretation. However, I am sceptical of a reduction of “meaning” that implies that it is to be understood *only* as a product of the interaction between text and reader, as many theorists will say. In fact, the other approaches will *also* bring aspects of truth and meaning to an interpretation. These other approaches are of course the ones mentioned above: author-based interpretations, and textually based readings.

By applying the metaphor of polyphony, or what other words could be called a relational approach, to textual interpretation, it is possible to achieve a degree of integration of results from the analysis which otherwise might seem to be incompatible. It also serves as an important reminder that there is no correct or final interpretation of a novel. This does not mean that some readings can be more convincing or transparent than others, and it is of course the critic’s job to strive after achieving testable interpretations. However, the point I wish to underline by using the presented method of relational readings, is that the interpretation of literary text is and must remain an unfinalizable project in the sense that the idea of truth(s) always lies “beyond”. There are no methods for reading which can serve to guarantee a final or correct interpretation. Historism, formalism, structuralism and reader-response theories all tend to ignore each others contributions, thus representing a monolithic faith in the one voice they seek to represent.¹²¹ I am sympathetic to aspects of all the above attempts to textual in-

¹²⁰ A classic in this respect is Iser, Wolfgang: *The Act of Reading. A theory of aesthetic response*: Baltimore 1978 (1st ed.).

¹²¹ This is, of course, a somewhat unfair criticism of many of the traditions I mention. Earlier traditions of literary theory cannot be expected to respond to the critique from later theorists. Likewise, reader-response theorists would probably protest at my insisting that they have a “monolithic” and unsophisticated understanding of literary “truth” and “meaning”. However, my point is that although my sympathies go strongly in their direction, I do find that we have much to gain from respecting what I take to be a real (and particular) insight, that there ARE many voices who claim their own truths: behind, in

terpretation, but have wished to transcend their singular perspectives and turn to a more fundamentally pluralistic method which, of course, is deeply influenced by the dialogic hermeneutics I have argued in favour of earlier.

6.5. The Relation Between Murdoch's Genres

With respect to the discussion above, specifically concerning the first dimension (the author), I shall comment on an on-going debate within Murdoch scholarship concerning the relation between Murdoch's philosophical and literary texts. Many Murdoch-scholars question the possibility of linking her different-genred work. In fact, she herself insists that they have nothing to do with each other, but I cannot agree with her. The concept of dialogue can possibly serve to dissolve this problem – at least certain aspects of it. An unmistakeable voice, which at several points enters the novel, is the voice of Murdoch the philosopher. However, this voice comes across in many stylistic forms, which makes it impossible to extract her philosophy from the text – even if theoretically it seems possible to do so. Any attempt to reduce a novel of hers to a philosophical treatise is to force it into a simple mould – which would be a misreading of Murdoch.

She contradicts herself in the ongoing dialogue between her different-genred texts. Although she argues strongly in favour of the primacy of literature as the arena of moral language, she does this in philosophical language. For instance:

Moral language which relates to a reality infinitely more complex and various than that of science is often unavoidably idiosyncratic and inaccessible. (...) [T]he most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature.¹²²

The most obvious answer to this, is to understand the way in which her texts “speak” to each other. They are non-reducible to each other, but in this dialogic interaction, deeper meaning arises. One could say that while her philosophy is somewhat abstract and decontextualized – but nevertheless authoritative, her novels provide the means of discussing her ideas in context, and thus making sure that her philosophical thought is, in Bakhtin's words, “applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts”.¹²³

and around a novel. And I am convinced that we do well if we enter into dialogue with, for instance, the author – whose voice has become marginalized for many years. The author carries no more of the truth than the reader, but no less either.

¹²² Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.34.

¹²³ Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.345.

While it is true that the relationship between her two genres can be understood through the concept of dialogue, it is important to bear in mind what I will call “the sameness and difference-factor”. Murdoch’s novels do affirm her philosophical point of view that the two languages compliment each other, or at least, belong in the same complex world. However, it is necessary to point out that her novels also disprove her philosophy at times. The two textual and linguistic genres cannot simply be reduced to merely to being different ways of communicating the same idea, i.e. what she insists is the complexity and contingency of human life reality. For instance, the realities she orchestrates in her novels sometimes call in question the validity of her philosophy. Further, an important condition for this dissertation, is my adherence to Murdoch’s insistence that ethics, or moral philosophy, must relate to the “muddle and messiness” of human life reality. Boldly stated, the language of the novel does this,¹²⁴ while a strict, scientific logical language does usually not.¹²⁵ However, both languages are necessary in order to grasp the complexity of reality. Stated in Bakhtinian terms, there is a dialogic, or polyphonic, representation of reality in the juxtaposition of scientific and literary language and thought, which, as we shall see in Part IV, is an important aspect of his view on authority in texts.

6.6. Approaching the Literary Analysis

Acknowledgement of the multipleness of different points of view on reality, truth and meaning is in itself an argument for a dialogic and hermeneutic approach to theological ethics, and to secular moral philosophy, as well as to the relation between them. As has been argued in this section of the thesis, the incommensurability of perspectives is not a problem, but represents the network-structure of interpretative difference which constitutes the foundation of a hermeneutic model of understanding and discussing the problem of moral authority. Hermeneutics thus provides a way to speak about the deep complexities inherent in seeking understanding of for instance the relations between God and humanity, of self and other, and of

¹²⁴ Martha Nussbaum provides an acute observation to this: “(...) the seductions of literature can frequently return us to a richer and more complex world; and the very enchantments of the novel can lead the reader past her tendencies to deny complexity, to evade the messiness of feeling.” Nussbaum, Martha: *Love’s Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York/Oxford 1990, p.238.

¹²⁵ I am aware that this distinction is probably too harsh, but I believe it is true at least with respect to the analytic language of much Twentieth Century moral philosophy and ethics. This is, as developed in Part I, a *background* for contemporary developments in ethics. As philosophers and other ethicists have included more contextual, and/or literary approaches in their work, such distinctions have been softened. However, as I shall discuss in Part V with respect to Character Ethics, narrativists such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre tend to use narrative as a way precisely to *counter* “muddle and messiness” (Cf. Part V, Chapter 13).

different points of entry to ethical theory. It takes into account the experience that whatever one says, there will always be another voice to contradict. And now, several voices, in agreement and contradiction with one another, will enter the conversation: those of Murdoch the novelist and philosopher, those of the narrator and characters of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and some others...

PART III: Literary Voices

7. A Presentation of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

7.1. Moral Discernment and the Novel

It is now time to pass through yet another gate into the field of the problem of moral authority, to follow a path of literary analysis and criticism. In Chapter 2.2. I formulated the operative question for the forthcoming sections (Parts III, IV and V) as follows: *How can one by help of literary analysis gain a deeper understanding of moral language and agency as substantially authoritative?* In the analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in Part V, I shall argue that a study of three of the characters contributes significantly to treating this question. I will focus on the dialogue (or counterpoising, or interaction, or relationship) internal to and between the characters, thus both demonstrating *and* developing further what already has been (and will be) discussed concerning authority and hermeneutic/dialogic theory and method. However, because no character is isolated, any analysis of these individuals must, on the basis of a dialogic reading, necessarily involve bringing in all the characters in the novel to a certain extent. This is part of the background for the extensive and ethically informed close reading in Part III.¹²⁶

In addition to bringing in a wider scope of characters than those to be studied in Part V, the analysis in Part III is on a wide basis in order to clarify my own interpretation. This interpretation is a background for Part V. I shall therefore study a variety of elements in the text, following the storyline of the novel quite closely. The interplay of form and content will be scrutinized, as this to a certain extent represents an aesthetic problem parallel to that of external (formal) and internal (substantial) authority. In doing this, I prepare to focus precisely on the distinction between seeing the main characters as *types* versus *individuals*: there is a tension here which provides language and metaphors to discuss the problem of moral authority in depth.

In order to do all this, I perform a study of ordinary dialogue between the characters as well as some over-arching structural motifs and symbolism. I also discuss a few of Murdoch's references to and intertextual use of works of art, literature and poetry. Analyses of discussions of

¹²⁶ By "ethically informed" I mean that the "relational readings" I introduced in Part II as methodological perspective includes me as reader as part of the dialogue. I read the text informed (but hopefully not dominated) by my background as a theological ethicist, in order to discuss the novel based on a specific ethical intention.

philosophical and religious ideas are relevant, as is looking at Murdoch's use of the temporal tensions in her characters' pasts, presents and futures. This close, methodological reading is part of the process of "unrealising myself" in relation to the text. In this chapter, I shall therefore present and discuss some aspects of reading and reflection concerning the novel as a whole, as a background to my interpretation of particular passages. I introduce some necessary information on formal aspects (mostly influenced by language from narratological tradition), focusing specifically on structure, story/plot, style, narrative technique and timeline.

Finally, before I enter the close reading of the novel, an observation on an ethical point is appropriate. In his conclusion of a discussion of the historical development of the novel, Bakhtin says the following:

The process of the novel's development has not yet come to an end. It is currently entering a new phase. For our era is characterized by an extraordinary complexity and deepening in our perception of the world; there is an unusual growth in demands of human discernment, on mature objectivity and the critical faculty. These are features that will shape the further development of the novel as well.¹²⁷

Bakhtin sees the novel as being shaped by ethical concerns in "our era". The demand for human discernment, mature objectivity and the critical faculty are all recognizable in and central to ethical discourse as well as in the novel. The polyphonic novel is a comment on, metaphor of and development of the ideas of self-reflection and the relational constitution of self as important aspects of moral progress. The quest for objectivity in a Bakhtinian sense, means a willingness to expose oneself to what is other, to enter into dialogue with voices external to one's own – thus expanding the scope of authority by which one can hold moral language to be true and operational. Moral discernment is thus to be seen as a dialogic process, which is a thought not uncommon in contemporary ethics.¹²⁸ It belongs with the constitution of self as both an individual and a social being. What is specifically Bakhtinian in this, is that the novel is a cultural "other" to our own historical situation. In reading, therefore, my self-reflection is activated at a level of learning moral discernment as I enter into dialogue with the cultural-linguistic world of the novel.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.40.

¹²⁸ For instance, Gustafson, to whom I shall return in Part VI, sees moral life (individually and collectively) as a process of *discernment*; i.e. the relational process towards being able to come to "some degree of certitude (...) about what God is enabling and requiring, and about the appropriate relations of ourselves and all things to God". Gustafson: *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective (Vol I)*, p.327.

¹²⁹ See an excellent discussion of this in Gardiner, Michael: *The Dialogics of Critique. M. M. Bakhtin and the theory of ideology*. London and New York 1992, p.95-98.

7.2. Formal Aspects: Narrative Technique, Style and Timeline

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is Iris Murdoch's 13th novel, the novel at the centre of her extensive authorship. Its 447 pages consist of two parts containing respectively 20 and 24 chapters. Structurally, Part One is a very long preparation for the more action-filled Part Two. The reader is given thorough introductions to each of the characters and to the setting in which the plot develops. The story unfolds slowly, but suddenly explodes in intensity towards the end of Part One. Part Two continues at a relatively high pace almost until the end. The final chapters, in which the stories are wound up and Murdoch tidies the strings into her suspiciously neat patterns, come somewhat as a surprise, told from a distance both of time and space which contrasts strongly with the closeness of narration which prevails throughout the rest of the novel.

The style of the novel is dominated by its visuality and strong imagery. References to, and effective use of light and darkness, strengthen this impression. This chiaroscuro effect gives the novel a cinematic quality, enhanced by the many descriptions of weather, atmosphere, clothes and interiors. Several central passages rely on a "peeping Tom" technique, in which the reader sees the action of the story from a concealed place together with one or two of the characters. This effect deepens the filmatic and theatrical visual experience of a certain distance between reader and characters. Only to a certain extent are auditive aspects described, but much dialogue provides an illusion of sound. There are comparatively few references to the senses of smell, taste or touch, which yet again strengthens the impression of distance. Such distance between text and reader emphasises that the story is *represented* reality. It is experience given artistic form.

It is often said of Murdoch's work that the inhabitants of the novels seldom move out of a rather confined milieu of upper middle class academics, civil servants and artists. All the characters speak in the same manner. Her (linguistic) style of narration is not very varied. When studied closely, however, one sees how much the texts are structured around the juxtaposition of voices. In Bakhtinian theory, this can be explained with reference to the characters' relative freedom from authorial control.¹³⁰ The distance between characters and narrator can serve to illustrate this. Further, in no sense does the narrator represent the authorial stance. Thus, the dialogism in her novels is a question of the *perspective* from which the characters speak – not the exact words that are spoken. Murdoch's novel therefore becomes alive be-

¹³⁰ Cf. Part IV, Ch.10.3.

cause of the intricate webs of interaction between the characters, partly at a verbal level, but even more so on a structural and symbolic level.

The technique of narration is subtle. At first glance, it can seem quite flat and uninteresting. But taking a closer look, one can see that the novel has an intricate and intelligent narrative construction. The movement between the different stylistic aspects is almost seamless, and can therefore be difficult to spot. There are two dominant means of narration. A past tense narrative told by an invisible, (more or less) omniscient, anonymous third person narrator, with extensive use of free indirect speech. There is no *apparent* reason not to trust the narrator, but we shall see that the narrator as well as the characters is the victim of a set of cosmic illusions. What *seems to be* is not always the case.

The other dominant form of narration is dialogic. A great portion of the story consists of long conversations, discussions, speeches and quarrels taking place between characters. The degree of trustworthiness is variable, as the dialogues range from the deeply truthful, to innocent misunderstandings and to blatant lies. Even internal monologue, which occurs several times, often has a dialogic quality to it. It is as if the characters speak with two voices, audibly or not. An important aspect of this dominant dialogic style is the overall dramatic effect it creates. The reader “watches” the unfolding story as a film, or stage play. The narrator’s voice, however, often serves as a visual guide. On stage or screen, one would *see* the clothes, the light etc.

This theatrical distance serves as a strong contrast to the few scenes in which the narration is very close, where the dominant forms of narration are momentarily disrupted. Internal thought can for instance have a stream-of-consciousness style, deeply focalized from a particular character’s point of view. This closeness can, however, be seductive, in the sense that it is easy to trust the narration at face value. An awareness of this interpretative temptation is important. Such passages are fragmented and disjointed, representative of muddled minds. They are almost instinctive, and can be said to represent internal “being” more than internal “thought”. These are very private and intense scenes, and are essential to the interpretation of the characters.

An aspect of this concerns the imagery, which is often archetypal. The internally focalized passages can be interpreted with reference to both Freudian and Jungian psychology. In fact, these archetypal images are more interesting as universal symbols than their role in the specific stories of the characters. Effectively (and ironically) therefore, it is the filmic or theatri-

cally distanced observational style that provides the best access to the *individuality* of the characters (although one must remember to be suspicious of such scenes).

Other disruptions of the dominant form of narration occur when in a handful of times the narrator suddenly changes the tense of narration, and moves from the past to the present tense. This is rare, and therefore to be noticed, because it signifies a reflective position within the text, which is an unusual occurrence. Yet another narrative technique is the use of letters. These letters play a crucial part in the plot, and are very important symbols of representation (art) as possible disruption of truth and insight: appearance and reality being different things.

A final, and important, aspect of narrative technique concerns the use of points of view. The point of view alternates between the nine characters. There is, however, no record of the evil character Julius's internal point of view until the very last page. This gives an elusive aspect to Julius, and he is judged solely by his actions and actually articulated words. The narrator is thus present at varying levels, sometimes close to the action, sometimes more distant, rather like a zoom camera. The double movements between closeness and distance on the one hand, and between the different characters' points of view on the other, are important to the later discussion of the novel.

Most of the time, the chronology of the novel follows a simple, linear timeline. There are a few instances where this line is disrupted, when the narrator tells a story from the past which is necessary in order to understand the present action or character. These flashbacks usually serve no other purpose than to inform the reader, and are thus not directly of much interest as a literary narrative device. They are interesting indirectly, though, from a more psychological point of view. Ricoeur insists that human life, and thus (moral) identity, can and should be studied as narrative. This is an important feature of this study. Sameness and otherness, a distinction that Ricoeur develops in his identification of two aspects of selfhood, namely "idem" and "ipse",¹³¹ is a central aspect of his narrative anthropology. Such dialectic structures internal to a person's life history (here, the relation between former self and present self), are important to identify and understand when studying character as representation of (moral) identity and action.

However, usually more interesting than the given flashbacks (the known stories of the characters' childhoods and histories), are the *other* background stories which would seem necessary to the main story that are never told. This gives a sense of mystery to the novel, and leaves the

¹³¹ Cf. Part IV, Ch.10.2.

reader curious as to what the true sub-text for the plot and the characters is. In addition, there are instances where the stories the characters tell in dialogue, have discrepancies from other tellings of the same stories. These instances raise central questions as to the trustworthiness of the characters.

7.3. Further Formal Aspects: Plot, Story and Characters

The *plot* of the novel develops within a web of intricate relationships, and is constructed more on a psychological than action-oriented level. For the most part the characters know each other very well. Much of the text involves a mapping out of the deep familiar, historical and emotional complications of this close knit group. Several sub-plots concern the development of individual relationships. These sub-plots are all set in motion by the main plot. This is, in abstract terms, about the infiltration of 'evil' into the jumble of human life, and the partial failure of 'good' to counter this. During the few summer weeks in which the story takes place, the already existing problems within the group of characters escalate, due to the demonic Julius King's malicious attempt to break up most of the relationships in the novel. Parents and children, siblings, friends, married couples and lovers are all affected. This leads to the destruction of several of the characters, but to personal development for others. Julius's proceedings to create havoc are countered by the Christ-like Tallis Browne, who tries to do the opposite from what Julius is doing. He is never as successful in doing good as Julius is at doing evil. His feeble attempts to "make things better" often make things worse. Tallis does in the end contribute to the partial liberation of many of the characters who have all been ensnared by Julius's evil powers. It is not quite a victory for the good Tallis, but nevertheless "a fairly honourable defeat".

The plot has several layers of meaning. At one level it is about the interaction of two human beings, Julius and Tallis, in the midst of the muddled people who inhabit the story. At another, it concerns a cosmic battle between good and evil, which fight for power over humanity (represented in the novel by all, but in particular by Morgan). Further, the plot provides a complex exploration of what it can mean to be morally good in a world in which God is dead and thus no longer can serve as a "guide to morals".

The *story* itself begins in a London garden in Priory Grove on a hot summer's day, in the late 1960's. The occasion is the twentieth wedding anniversary of Rupert and Hilda Foster. Rupert is a civil servant and amateur philosopher. Hilda is a housewife. The Fosters are happy. They talk about their good life and their love for one another. The only cloud on the horizon is their

son, Peter, who is a student, and currently strongly rebellious towards his parents. The Fosters drink champagne by their swimming pool, and are expecting guests for dinner. The guests are a homosexual couple, Rupert's younger brother Simon Foster, and Simon's somewhat older partner, Axel Nilsson. Simon is an art historian. Axel is an old friend of Rupert's from Oxford University, currently a colleague of his in the Civil Service at Whitehall. During the Fosters' conversation before and after Simon and Axel arrive, the entirety of the novel's nine characters are introduced. One of these is another of Rupert's friends from university, Julius King. He is a professor of biology and has recently returned to England from the United States where he was involved in the development of chemical and biological weapons. He has just ended an affair with Hilda's sister Morgan Browne, also an academic, whose subject is linguistics. Morgan is married to Tallis Browne, although she has left him for Julius. The Brownes have no children. Tallis lives in a large house in Notting Hill with his father, Leonard Browne, and Peter Foster.

The story starts developing when Morgan arrives unexpectedly at the Fosters' garden party in a state of shock, completely devastated that Julius has left her. Hilda looks after her, and Morgan stays with the Fosters for a while, trying to sort herself out. During the novel she moves into her own flat. She finds out that Julius is in London, and unsuccessfully sets out to win him back. In response to Morgan's faith in the strength of love, Julius tells her that he is able to split up any relationship at will, and that he will prove himself capable of this by estranging Simon and Axel, and Rupert and Hilda from each other. This seems very unlikely to Morgan, but as she is desperate for Julius's attention, she does not try to stop him. However, Julius turns his game against Morgan as well. Julius finds and steals old love-letters, written by Rupert to Hilda, and sends these to Morgan. He also sends letters written by Morgan to himself to Rupert. Morgan and Rupert thus both believe that the other is in love with them. Their vanity leads to them each imagining that they are in love with the other, while it is in fact only themselves they see – through the faux love of the other. They begin a passionate, but strange and improbable affair. Julius makes sure that Hilda finds out about this, and pretends to be there for her in her unhappiness, causing her to rethink her original scepticism towards him. He also deliberately places wedges between Simon and Axel. Julius does all this by finding all the characters' weak spots, their vices, and playing upon them in order to destroy the relationships. Tallis finds out what has been going on, and exposes Julius's frauds for what they are. He forces the others, who are all caught in this web of lies, to be honest with each other. He only partially succeeds in rescuing the remains of happiness.

In the end, Julius succeeds in ruining the Fosters. Rupert, the great idealist, is the loser. He dies by drowning while drunk in the swimming pool in the garden – a grotesque contrast to the happy wedding anniversary where the story starts. Because of several random accidents, Hilda, who has been told by Tallis what has happened, does not manage to save Rupert in time. Hilda and Morgan gradually but uncertainly become friends again after Tallis has exposed Julius's game. The sisters and Peter will move to California to start a new life. Morgan and Tallis do not reunite as a married couple, but settle their relationship as friends. Leonard is told that he suffers from cancer, and only has a short time to live. Simon and Axel go to Greece on holiday. Their relationship is the only one to survive and become stronger. They return to the happiness they once knew, having become even closer to each other. Julius never takes any responsibility for his actions, and the novel ends with him in a café in Paris, very pleased with himself. It is as if he is looking for a new arena in which to play evil games with vulnerable human lives.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is typical of Murdoch's novels in that there are very few references to characters outside those of the told narrative. Murdoch often creates a little bubble of people who interact solely with each other. The constructed world of this novel seems natural and true to life at a first glance. It is easy to imagine that the characters are involved in other relations and activities than what the reader can see. On second thoughts, one realises that there are large gaps in the available information. The wish to have access to the external action, unknown to the narrator, is a clever illusion. The characters are of course fictional and have no existence outside the story. However, as a reader one can easily imagine "thicker" persons and lives than that provided by the text itself. At this stage, the reader creatively constructs images of unified lives based on a few fragments of storyline, and is thus profoundly involved in the process of meaning-making. This is why it is important to reflect on the trustworthiness of the narrator, and of the degree of revelation of the inner lives.¹³²

7.4. Former Reviews and Earlier Criticism

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is regarded by many as one of Murdoch's most important novels. In it, the most central themes throughout her literary career, namely that of the search for human goodness without God, and correspondingly, the quest to understand the nature of evil,

¹³² Apropos an aspect of an ethical reading of a novel: attention to characters in a novel can serve as a form of moral education, as a reminder of the importance of just and compassionate attention to the real life characters around us, whose stories are told by a multitude of narrators and whose inner lives can be more or less mysterious to us.

are very much in the foreground. Although this provides excellent opportunities to discuss these themes in a philosophical context, some critics point to the fact that the strong presence of the ideas she discusses tends to blur the personalities of the characters. Therefore, these critics see the novel to be slightly inferior to some of her more disguised explorations of the central themes. This opinion is for instance that of the Rubin Rabinowitz, who has studied Murdoch extensively and reviewed *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in the *New York Times* when it was published. Other influential writers on Murdoch, for instance Peter Conradi, disagree with this, and insist on the realism of the characters.¹³³ Rabinowitz continues his critique by pointing out that not only does the strong presence of her philosophical ideas contribute to inferior characters, but to artificial plots. He writes: “Melodramatic incidents and transparent stratagems, useful as they are as indicators of the novel’s philosophical aspects, strain the reader’s belief.”¹³⁴ He finds the novel intelligent but incredible. The plot is, according to him, strangely improbable. It is true that the plot of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* does have an artificial aspect to it. It is, however, not so much the story told that captivates the readers. It is what the story represents, and the larger context it seems to refer to. The Bible, Shakespeare, Plato, Faust, Arthurian myth and other texts are all constantly present as the interpretative backdrop for the novel.

The British author Antonia S. Byatt, an important critic of many of Murdoch’s novels, provides no in depth account of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. However, she does refer to it in an essay where she discusses Murdoch’s use of Shakespeare.¹³⁵ She points out that the plot which Rabinowitz found so artificial is typically Shakespearian. It is an inverted echo of *Much Ado About Nothing*,¹³⁶ in which the confusion of false letters leads to the union of Beatrice and Benedict. This is an important observation, because while such plots are not necessarily probable, they do give freedom and scope for the characters to be portrayed with the psychological realism which is Murdoch’s intention, and which Conradi finds in his reading. In continuation of this, Byatt refers to what Murdoch reputedly said about literature, that it is “a battle between real people and images”,¹³⁷ which in the discussion of the novel in Part V of

¹³³ Cf. Part V, Chapter 13.6., where more detail to this discussion between Rabinowitz and Conradi is provided.

¹³⁴ Rabinowitz, Rubin: (Review of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*) in: *New York Times*, February 8, 1970. (<http://www.nytimes.com/books/home>, 13.09.2004)

¹³⁵ Byatt: *Degrees of Freedom*, p.318-320.

¹³⁶ Shakespeare, William: *Much Ado About Nothing*, in: *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare* London 1987. General editors: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (p.661-688).

¹³⁷ Murdoch cited without reference in Byatt: *Degrees of Freedom*, p.318.

this thesis will be reflected in an analysis of the characters based on their duality as simultaneously *types* (images) and *individuals* (real people).

Hilda Spear, another British critic, also discusses the Shakespearian influence on *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in her short analysis of the novel. She comments that the apparent comedy of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* has a sinister edge to it.¹³⁸ The novel's references to the comedies *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*¹³⁹, accentuate the presence of a constant *inversion* of what seems to be. This sceptical attitude to the surface level of storyline is also relevant when it comes to weather. In most of the novel it is sunny and hot, which does not coincide with expectations of the atmosphere surrounding the evil plotting of Julius. Spear brings attention to the Platonic background of the myth of the cave, but does not explicitly point out the point that the breach between the apparent and the real corresponds to Plato's juxtaposing of the fire and the sun. This will be a central aspect to the later analysis, but as with the oscillation between the characters seen as *types* and *individuals*, the Platonic myth will surface several times during Part III.

Other Murdoch critics who have contributed to my interpretation of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* are Suguna Ramanathan, who has provided an important study of several Murdochian characters as "figures of good".¹⁴⁰ *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is treated in the introduction, in which Tallis is read as the ultimate image of good in Murdoch's authorship and thus as the "norm" for goodness in characters from other novels. Elizabeth Dipple provides an interesting reading under the chapter heading of "Pilgrim's Progress", and links her analysis of pilgrimage to the asceticism and death-theme in *Bruno's Dream*,¹⁴¹ the novel which immediately precedes *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.¹⁴² Central to her discussion is also a reflection on the title. Who does it refer to? Who defeats whom? This provides some interesting perspectives on the deep ambivalence of the novel's "meaning". Barbara Heusel and Bran Nicol both provide Bakhtinian readings of Murdoch's literary work, and are therefore relevant as conversation partners in this sense.¹⁴³ Heusel, in particular, is concerned with paradox and ambivalence in Murdoch's authorship. She discusses this explicitly with respect to *A Fairly Honourable De-*

¹³⁸ Spear: *Iris Murdoch*, p.69.

¹³⁹ Shakespeare, William: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in: *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare* London 1987. General editors: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (p.575-600).

¹⁴⁰ Ramanathan, Suguna: *Iris Murdoch. Figures of Good*. London 1990, p.1-38.

¹⁴¹ Murdoch, Iris: *Bruno's Dream*, London 1969.

¹⁴² Dipple, Elizabeth: *Iris Murdoch. Work for the Spirit*. London 1982, p.167-196.

¹⁴³ See for instance Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.225, Heusel: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels*, p.119-121, and Nicol, Bran: *Iris Murdoch. The Retrospective Fiction*. London 1999, p.54-56.

feat. Nicol uses the double presence of myth and realism as interpretive figures to Murdoch's literature. His primary focus is to study how the characters are motivated by and formed in relation to the past. All these critics (and others) have influenced my reading, which – although fundamentally my own – has been developed in its final stages in continuation of and in opposition to the mentioned contributions.

8. A Close Reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

8.1. Central Scenes and Passages in Part One

In the close reading, I shall work my way through a selection of central scenes and passages from *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. The criterion for selection has been the particular relevance of a given passage to the literary-ethical analysis and discussion of the three main characters which will take place in Part V. A discussion of the relevance of the passages will take place in each of the sub-sections of the analysis. The aim of the close reading is to give the reader a wide understanding of central textual aspects. The chosen extracts are thus central with regard to the actual action which takes place, important symbolism, the development of relationships and explicit character description. As the chronology of the story is very close to the plotted structure, I have chosen a reading which follows the novel's time-line. However, in the actual analysis, I draw on textual resources from the whole novel. Thus, my analysis of the earlier parts of the novel will be seen in the light of the later section, as well as, more obviously, vice versa.¹⁴⁴ A last comment on the forthcoming close reading is appropriate: namely a word on the titles of the sub-chapters. These are mine, and therefore represent my particular interpretation and reconstruction of the novel. The reasons I have for the choice of wording, will hopefully emerge from the actual analyses.

a) The Exposition (Chapters 1-3)

The three first chapters are chosen as material for the textual analysis primarily because together they provide the story's exposition. Here, the characters, their backgrounds, personali-

¹⁴⁴ My reading is also informed by my philosophical partners in dialogue, Ricoeur, Bakhtin and in particular, Murdoch. Although I have not yet presented my interpretations of their work in full (this is the task of Part IV), I have attempted to show where they have provided helpful perspectives. In the case of Murdoch, these discussions take place in the body text of the analysis, while Ricoeurian and Bakhtinian contributions are, for the time being, confined to footnotes. Although this analysis has a close focus on the text itself, I have chosen to include these glimpses of external interpretative influence in order not to obscure my awareness that a process of interpretation is non-linear and interactive.

ties, and relationships, are introduced to the reader at a surface level. The situational background for the plot and development of the story is also given. In addition to this, I identify some important symbolic, intertextual and mythic frameworks which are central to my interpretation of the novel, and therefore need to be introduced.

Chapter 1

The first chapter contains no explicit action other than a casual and lively conversation between Rupert and Hilda, which is narrated in direct speech. The whole chapter consists of dialogue, apart from a passage very early in the text in which the narrator describes the scene in great detail, providing information on what Rupert and Hilda look like, the smell of a summer garden, the evening light, the general pleasant atmosphere and warm temperature and so forth. The narrator's role as "camera" is obvious here, and typical throughout the novel. This introductory chapter is of particular importance, because three of the central sub-themes of the novel are identifiable here.

The *first* of these sub-themes concerns the intricacy of the characters' lives and relationships. The novel is centred on the development of these relationships. For example, we learn that Julius and Morgan have recently broken up. This, we understand, is going to be central to the story, especially when we learn that the ex-husband, Tallis, is still close to the family. That Hilda does not quite approve of Axel, or of homosexuals in general, is another. Peter's rebellious dropping out of university and opposition to his parents is a third of such relational themes. Apart from such superficial elements however, there are several aspects of the Fosters' conversation, which, through different routes, introduce the central scheme of events in the novel concerning the people involved. The *second* central sub-theme relates to a discussion the Fosters have which has some relevance to an analysis of an explicitly moral element of the novel, namely a question concerning the future of morality in a world in which God is dead. What, in such a situation, can be the "guide to morality"? This is, as mentioned earlier, a recurring theme in Murdoch's novels. The *third* and most important theme to which the exposition subtly hints, is the deep structure of the novel: the grand Biblical narrative which the novel both echoes and distorts. The structure of the novel is, as Conradi points out, a religious allegory. However, as he says: "it is an enabling, not a determining structure."¹⁴⁵ Throughout the analysis this formal, adopted structure is rendered dynamic in its dialogic relation to the idiosyncrasy of the story and individual characters, who to a certain extent can be read as

¹⁴⁵ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.205.

substitutes for, or representations of, God, Satan and humanity. The Biblical structure is paradigmatic to what can be interpreted as a cosmic fight over the human soul in the novel, a fight that takes place between the powers of good and evil. As this is a central motif in my analysis of the main characters, I shall begin my close reading by examining the exposition's textual evidence for an identification of this particular sub-theme.

Reading this first chapter as an introduction to a Biblical sub-plot, it is possible to identify several references to Genesis. The scene can quite easily be constructed as a representation of a Paradisic situation before the Fall. The Fosters feel happy and lucky in life, and are very slightly guilty about it. Hilda cannot imagine that anything could be better than the relationship she and Rupert have, and she kindly teases Rupert about being very sentimental about relationships: "You get so soppy about couples. One's got to be realistic".¹⁴⁶ This common sense and realism is typical for Hilda throughout the novel, just as much as Rupert is cast as a sentimental idealist. At one point Rupert says: "Anything is permitted to us" (FHD:16), thus echoing Adam and Eve in Eden. There is an innocence to his world view, and no mention of forbidden fruit. However, quite soon, there is hint that Rupert *knows* about forbidden fruit, but that he does not quite see it as a relevant temptation in his own life. It occurs in a conversation about Axel, in which Rupert reproaches Hilda for generalizing about homosexuals. He points out that

'Any sentence beginning "All queers..." is pretty sure to be false! It's like "All married men..." "All married men over forty deceive their wives".'
'Well, we know *that's* false!' (FHD:18)

In this, Hilda's point about Rupert's lack of realism turns out to be right, as he, a man over forty, *will* deceive his wife. He has an affair with Morgan. This will happen because, at a certain level, he believes that anything is permitted to him. He proves to be soppy about love, as Hilda says, and is too naïve to be aware of the wider context of his actions. In his innocent faith in romantic love, he is susceptible to manipulation by evil, and will forget certain responsibilities to those close to him. Rupert's idealistic liberal-humanist philosophical views often turn out to be insufficiently attuned to reality. They are general ideals, which again and again he fails to live up to. His optimism on behalf of humanity is strong. He becomes blinded to its murkier side, and does not truly take this into account. This first chapter provides a

¹⁴⁶ Murdoch: *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, p.15. (Future references to the novel will be provided in the body text as FHD.)

cosmic framework by which to understand and interpret Rupert's challenge, namely that of wisely handling the relation between "dead" ideals and the harsh realities of human life.

A further hint to the paradisiac setting, is given by the impression that the years of marriage have had a timeless, eternal quality to them. This stands in stark contrast to the forthcoming action of the novel, that which happens after 'evil' enters the scene and time hurries by. The only indications of time having passed, are when the narrator describes Hilda as "a plumper angel now" (FHD:11), and when Hilda says "It's hard to believe that's twenty years ago" (FHD:16), referring to their wedding. These comments both suggest a time difference, but also imply that time is rather insignificant. The reference to Hilda's angelic quality is another means of bringing supernatural, cosmic and timeless images into play.¹⁴⁷

At one point Rupert comments that being an unhappy insomniac must be hell (FHD:17). In contrasting happiness and hell to each other in this way, it is implied that the happiness in this scene is heavenly, or paradisiac. The plot of the novel is, as already indicated, centred on Julius's demonic infiltration and destruction of the happiness in these first chapters. We shall see later that Julius considers happiness to be a fragile illusion of humankind. He seeks to prove that the paradise of the exposition is nothing but a fantasy. In several occasions later in the novel, the happiness of this scene in the garden is echoed and parodied. Gradually, the eternal Eden becomes distorted, and becomes a world of finitude, a place of death and destruction – but also of life after death. It is in this garden that Rupert dies, and from which Hilda, Morgan and Peter escape to discover a new paradise – in California.

The opening words of the novel is the name of Julius King, the personification of evil. His central role in the novel is indicated from the very beginning. The choice of words in Rupert and Hilda's following comments about him, suggests an almost religious reverence:

'Julius King.'

'You speak his name as if you were meditating upon it.'

'I am meditating upon it.'

'He's not a saint.'

'He's not a saint. And yet –' (FHD:11)

¹⁴⁷ Murdochian angel symbolism often represents and alludes to the unconscious mind. Such oscillation between the levels on which the action of the story has its place (i.e. subconscious/psychological, realistic/mimetic and cosmic/symbolic), is a fundamental feature of this novel. I shall return to the angel motif later.

The opening words of the book of Genesis, are: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”¹⁴⁸. Here, Julius is “in the beginning”, and he is an object of meditation. He is not a saint, but the question as to *what* he is, is open ended. This opening passage is significant to the interpretation of the novel. That Julius for most of the time is cast as the novel’s evil force, stands in striking contrast to this introduction. It is *God* who creates, who is in the beginning – not Satan. This ambivalence is typical of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and is a central aspect to my reading of the novel. I have indicated earlier that premeditated conceptions of good and evil are challenged by Murdoch, and textual elements such as this serve to disrupt simple transfigurations. The continuing uncertainty as to what role Julius actually is ascribed, determines some of the reader’s experience of suspense throughout the novel.

Thus, an implication of my reading of the introduction, is that Julius is cast as a supernatural, God-like being, with powers of creation. This image is soon disturbed, however, when his powers of destruction are highlighted:

‘What was Julius working on exactly?’
 ‘Nerve gas. And a kind of anthrax which resists antibiotics.’
 ‘You were all praising Julius for chucking it. I blame him for ever getting involved in it.’
 ‘You have to investigate the stuff in order to find the antidotes.’
 ‘I hate that old argument. All evil lives on it.’ (FHD:12)

From Rupert and Hilda’s dialogue, we learn that Julius’s participation in the development of potentially genocidal chemical and biological weapons, involves a morbid mixture of creation (the making of weapons) and destruction (what they will be used for). Julius is, in fact, a creator of destruction, with a certain power over humanity, a power with cosmic overtones. This is an ambiguous motif, and it is crucial to understanding not only the character Julius, but also to the theme of the novel, in that conceptions of both good and evil are challenged. We shall return to the duality of this creator/destructor-motif several times throughout the interpretation of the text. In this passage, in stark contrast to the former one, Julius is directly connected to evil. The common-sense, realistic Hilda senses this demonic aspect of Julius, but Rupert the idealist does not.

A little later, Hilda says: “I could never manage to see how Julius felt” (FHD:13). This is important, as no-one (apart from Tallis) is able to see this. Not even the narrator pierces the mind of Julius until the very end of the novel. This adds to his mysteriousness, and thus enhances the “supernatural aspect” of him. However, Hilda is vaguely aware of the possible

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 1:1. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (1973/1978/1984)

difference between his appearance and the action by which he is judged on the one hand, and his inner life, the internal motivation for actions, and the problem of suffering in secret on the other. That this perspective on Julius is introduced right from the beginning, is important with respect to the ambivalence the reader has towards him throughout the novel. So far, however, the portrayal of Julius is of a powerful, intelligent creator-destroyer with no compassion or qualms. For instance, we learn that he did not give up his research because of moral considerations, but for the reason that it bored him (FHD:13).

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is not, however, a simple transfiguration of the Biblical narrative. In contrast to the Biblical story, Rupert (Adam) dies with little hope of redemption, as the good Tallis loses the final battle and the evil Julius, the Serpent, the Tempter, Satan, wins. The new heaven and new earth in California which Hilda, Morgan and Peter experience at the end of the novel, has an unreal, parodic quality to it. Throughout the analysis I shall study the degree to which the story of the novel both echoes and differs from the Christian narrative. The many forthcoming echoes and distortions of the Biblical sub-structure I have identified here in the novel's exposition, are significant to the character portrayals of both Julius and Tallis. In the text, the two are often presented as being otherworldly, both in a religious and philosophical sense. They both represent transcendent ideas. A motif in the novel is one of incarnation (which may, but not necessarily, be interpreted in Christian terms). Good and evil are "made flesh" in the present story. The narratives of Julius and Tallis contextualise abstract concepts. This motif allows me to discuss what I have identified as a central theme in the novel, namely the exploration of the relation between ideals and reality: what happens when abstract ideas, or concepts, of good and evil become embodied (or incarnated) in the context of human life? Or is it rather that the context of human life is what provides such concepts with their meaning? Or are both questions false?

Some words must be said as a background to understand how Murdoch treats such problems. She is an atheist, but is nevertheless linguistically influenced by Christianity. This applies both to her philosophical and literary language. Her mental images of the world are structurally close to a Christian-Platonic (Augustinian) vision (more so than from within an Aristotelian tradition through Thomas Aquinas). This is recognisable in an emphatic distinction between the immanent and transcendent, and a conception of what she calls the (metaphysical) *idea of perfection* as the ultimate guide to morality. She insists that human morality can only truly be understood without God. For her, 'God' is just a consoling fantasy. It is a clever man-

made image which prevents us from seeing reality in all its randomness.¹⁴⁹ In her essay “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’”, she writes: “I shall suggest that God was (or is) a *single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention*; and I shall go on to suggest that moral philosophy should attempt to retain a central concept which has all these characteristics.” (SOG:55) The concept she retains when “God is dead”, is the concept of good. The good must not be conflated with God. Good is unattainable and undefineable, but like the sun, it casts light onto the world and provides clear vision. In many of her novels and essays, the philosopher Murdoch and the novelist Murdoch in different ways seek how to understand and envision such a concept.

There is a link between the distorted Biblical sub-structure and the second sub-theme I identified above, namely that which concerns the quest for a morality without God. How is one to “do” moral philosophy in such a context? It is quite clear in many of Murdoch’s novels that this important moral question is treated by way of a literary exploration. In other words, she explores possible consequences of her godless metaphysics. With specific reference to the present text, this theme is introduced by Rupert and Hilda when they discuss their son Peter and his flight from university. They discuss the place of God in their world, in contrast to Peter’s reality. Rupert begins:

‘Peter belongs to the first generation that can really envisage the end of the human race. And he belongs to the first generation that’s grown up entirely without God.’
 ‘We disbelieved in God. It didn’t turn us against the whole of creation.’
 ‘God was still around when we were young. It’s different now.’
 ‘Then let him join the communist party. I think dropping out is cynicism.’
 ‘No. no. Cynicism is the real vice. It’s the vice of the age and it could be the end of us all. These young creatures are really consumed by a sort of incoherent love.’ (FHD:20)

Rupert worries that without God, or even a “god-shaped hole”, coming generations will have nothing by which to guide their morals, nothing to structure their thought by. He is sincerely concerned, and wants to counter the cynicism he sees. The idealist Rupert wishes to make “coherent” the love he sees in the younger generation. He wants to find out how one communicates morality in such a context. For this reason, he is currently writing a philosophical treatise on the subject – as a hobby. His project is in many ways similar to Murdoch’s own, in that he seeks an alternative to God as a guide to morals. However, Rupert’s two big projects (his book and his life) will both fail. This is because he falls short of connecting his ideals to reality. He ultimately fails the test that Julius will give him. At the end of the novel, Julius

¹⁴⁹ Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.72. (Hereafter referred to in the body text as SOG.)

tells Tallis what his motivation for the fraud was. He says: “I couldn’t help wondering how old Rupert would stand up to a real test and what all this high-minded muck would amount to in practice.” (FHD:403) We have seen an indication of Rupert’s lack of connectedness between theory and praxis already, and it is further exemplified in an interesting passage, in which the Fosters discuss morality. It is central to the novel, and to understanding Rupert. Hilda asks:

‘What’s that Latin tag you’re always quoting about *dilig* something?’
‘*Dilige et fac quod vis*. Love and do as you please.’
‘Yes. I think Morgan imagined she could live by that. And it’s turned out a mess.’
‘I doubt if any human being can live by that. That we can’t is a fundamental feature of this jumble.’
‘Did you say “jungle” or “jumble”?’
‘Jumble. Human existence.’
‘Why are you always quoting that thing then, if it has no application?’
‘It’s – an attractive idea’
‘Pouf!’ (FHD:24-5)

Rupert is perfectly aware of the fact that “love and do as you please” is no more than an attractive idea, and that it cannot be applied to human existence. Nevertheless, this is the one ideal he embodies, and it leads to his destruction. This is a key to understanding Rupert’s narrative, which can be described as a downward spiral from the good, idealistic man we are introduced to in the garden, who drinks champagne in the sunlight by the pool, and to the man who drowns disillusioned in the same pool, drunk and unhappy in the dark night. Similarly, the theme of abstract ideals versus human existence (“the jumble”) is a constantly recurring theme at many levels of the novel. For instance, it runs through all the character’s narratives.

Chapter 2

I shall now present the rest of the exposition with a glance at the first of the three mentioned themes, namely that of the complex relationships between the characters. The focus changes in the second chapter, which is still part of the exposition. The narrator leaves the Fosters, and represents a different conversation parallel in time. There is a major difference in narrative technique between the first and second chapter. The narrator is active on Simon’s behalf in this chapter, while we do not have similar access to what Axel or either of the Fosters might be thinking. Simon is throughout the novel focalized more often than any of the others, although such focalization is not exclusive to him in any way. It does, however, create a persisting impression of closeness to and identification with Simon, which is relevant to an interpretation of him.

While Hilda and Rupert wait for their guests, Axel and Simon are in their car on their way to the Fosters' house. The beginning of this chapter is similar to the introduction to Hilda and Rupert's conversation. It therefore contributes further to the readers' expectation concerning the impact Julius's role will have in the story. Simon says to Axel:

'Penny for them.'
'Julius King.'
'Oh!'
'What do you mean, "oh"?'
'Just "oh".'
'You seem dismayed.'
'I'm not dismayed.'
'Perhaps you ought to be.'
'Stop it, Axel.'
'You are so teasable, Simon.' (FHD:28)

The conversation between this couple is throughout darker and more serious than the one between Rupert and Hilda, which was filled with more or less pure and simple happiness (although they did touch upon serious themes). Axel and Simon's dialogue is more hesitant, less flowing. Whereas the Fosters seem to be all surface and not much substance throughout their dialogue, the narration of the pain, uncertainty and fumbling closeness of Simon and Axel has a ring of depth and reality to it. In this, we see a deeper aspect of the development of the relationships in the novel than what has been conveyed in the Foster's conversation, namely the themes of sex, suffering and love, which are present in all the characters' stories. Axel and Simon's conversation introduces some of this complex jumble of experiences, and gives access to some important metaphors in this respect – as we shall see soon.

In the car on the way to the Fosters, Axel is upset and cross. Simon worries about him. He suspects Axel of being deeply fascinated by Julius, and that he had therefore been upset by Julius's affair with Morgan. At this point, the narrator transcends Simon's point of view and shows his perception of the situation to be wrong: Axel is upset because he realises that Simon is very fond of Morgan. This is an example of the narrator posed as "other" to the focalized character, which is of particular interest because it challenges the individual character's interpretation of events and thoughts. However, because of the dialogic style of the

novel, the narrator as “other” is often silent. A consequence of this, is that the reader cannot be sure whether or not to trust the characters – even when they have the dominant voice.¹⁵⁰

Passages such as this, in which one of the characters is focalized and the other present only in direct speech, also provides an effective way of conveying secrets. For instance, although Axel does not know this, the reader learns that Simon once slept with Morgan as a student. This has been his only heterosexual experience. That neither Simon nor Axel take the other’s words at face value, is, from the reader’s point of view, understandable. The two men always seem to expect a hidden meaning, which the reader knows will often be the case. Their relationship is ridden by secretive thoughts and jealousy, and trust is a difficult issue for them. In particular, it is central to the novel that Axel’s love for Simon appears to correspond to the degree in which Simon is truthful. Much of the time, therefore, Axel’s love appears to be (and is somewhat) conditional. When Simon later finds himself caught in a web of lies and half-truths which he cannot tell Axel, it almost leads to the couple’s destruction. In this chapter, the foundation for their drama of jealousy, secrets and lies is revealed. Julius will see this, and uses it against them. Their story as a couple is primarily defined by this challenge.

At the end of the chapter, two aspects of their conversation are particularly significant, largely because they both have strong intertextual (and thus dialogic) implications. One is a reference to the Italian renaissance artist Titian’s painting *The Flaying of Marsyas*.¹⁵¹ In the myth which the painting portrays, Apollo lovingly lets his rival musician Marsyas be flayed alive. The myth represents a Dionysian rite, in which the ugly self must be painfully removed in order for the beautiful self to emerge. Murdoch often refers to the myth in the context of discussions of the Platonic view of ascesis (what she calls ‘*unselfing*’),¹⁵² and she uses the image in many of her novels.¹⁵³ It is about the death of the self, and this involves, as Simon points out, that: “Someone is flayed really. And there’s only blood and pain and no love” (FHD:41).¹⁵⁴ The effect of this reference is that it provides a sense of the drama of the story to come. The ques-

¹⁵⁰ This is a clear example of Bakhtinian polyphony. It serves to refract, or relativize the individual voices within the text, and also enhances the reader’s suspicion towards what is said and thought in the novel.

¹⁵¹ See a further discussion of this painting in Part IV, Chapter 11.5.

¹⁵² I shall discuss the Platonic aspects of ‘unselfing’ at a later stage, see Part IV, Chapter 11.3.

¹⁵³ For more on this myth in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, see Nicol: *Iris Murdoch*, p.8.

¹⁵⁴ Heusel writes about Murdoch’s use of the myth itself (not the painting) in character portrayal, which is something she often does: “Appropriating this myth, Murdoch makes her characters more poignant in their desire to escape to slavery inherent in their system, an imitation (simulation) of human life, and to escape the masochism that results from total acceptance of any culture’s ideology.” Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.255.

tion is: which of the characters is Marsyas? Which is Apollo? Conradi points out that in Murdoch's earlier novels, the myth is more explicitly present in the sense that that stories transfigure the myth and are thus more bound by it.¹⁵⁵ Here (and in future novels), the myths function more as carnivalistic irony¹⁵⁶ with respect to the text. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the myth cannot be used to explain any single character's story. But it serves to comment, to invert and to open up a questioning as towards what, in fact, happens in the story. Who will be flayed?

The second important intertextual reference occurs when Simon sees a poodle outside the car. (FHD: 40) This refers to several classic works of literature where a poodle *is*, or is associated to, the Devil. This is particularly prominent in texts such as Goethe's *Faust*,¹⁵⁷ or Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*,¹⁵⁸ in both of which the Devil himself (more or less explicitly) tempts the main characters to trade their soul for exceptional gifts. The Faustian motif of selling one's soul to the Devil provides a sinister undercurrent to the present story, and has a strong presence in Simon's story. However, yet again there is an inversion in the use of textual reference.¹⁵⁹ Simon's narrative will differ from the Faustian plot in that he resists the temptation of Julius's flirting, although he is strongly affected by it. Therefore, he does not have remarkable abilities. Rather, the opposite point is actually often made. But he is loved, and he survives. The animal/Satanic motif continues: the men talk about getting a pet. Simon wants a cat, Axel does not. Cats are traditionally magic animals. In *The Master and Margarita*, Woland and his cat both represent evil forces. Cats are reputedly the companions of witches, and the reference to these animals indicate evil and danger looming dangerously near. Axel's main argument against getting a cat is that they would be enslaved by it, which comments on what is later going to happen to them when they almost become enslaved by Julius (Satan), but not quite.

¹⁵⁵ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.94-95.

¹⁵⁶ To the Bakhtinian concept of 'carnival', see Part IV, Chapter 10.3.

¹⁵⁷ Goethe, J. W.: *Faust. Part I*, Oxford 1998 (Translated by David Luke, from the 1st edition: *Faust. Der Tragödie Erster Teil*, 1806). Faust's poodle turns into a hippopotamus (Behemoth in Russian), or the Devil: "How long and broad the poodle grows! / He rises up in mighty pose, / 'Tis not a dog's form that he shows!" (Quoted from an online edition of the above: (<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/faust04.html>, 17.09.2004).

¹⁵⁸ Bulgakov, Mikhail B.: *The Master and Margarita*. London 1997. (Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky from the original Russian edition from 1966/1967). Here, Woland (the Satan figure) carries a walking stick with a head formed as a poodle, and his companion, a cat, is called Behemoth. Both *Faust* and *The Master and Margarita* use images from the book of Job.

¹⁵⁹ The technique of inverting intertextual references has been commented on with reference to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Bible, and the myth of Apollo and Marsyas.

Chapter 3

When Axel and Simon arrive at Rupert and Hilda's house, the two former chapters converge into a new sequence. In this third chapter of the exposition, several of the most important recurring symbols are introduced. Of particular importance is the dramatic use of atmospheric conditions, and of light contrasting with darkness. Other symbols, such as angels and animals (in addition to the poodle and cats from above), also appear in this scene. Dialogue still dominates, but the narrator also gives a bird's view of the scene, in addition to taking Hilda's point of view in a passage of internal reflection. There is sunshine and champagne, there are flowers and smiles. The atmosphere is light: "'Happiness, my pets!' cried Simon. 'Happiness!' 'Happiness!' they all said and drank." (FHD:42). In a sense, the drinking of champagne marks the end of paradise. From now on, darkness enters the story. This is illustrated by the passage following directly after Simon's toast to happiness. Hilda goes to put some flowers in water, and there is a curious atmosphere indoors. The contrast between the light and heat outside and the darkness and coolness inside is strong, and one senses a disturbance in the apparent happiness. Yet it is not unpleasant.

In the sudden coolness of the drawing room she paused. After the bright sun the room was for a moment almost invisible, a matrix of dusky colour splashes and points of dim light. Hilda laid the flowers down on the table. She sighed, yielding herself to float lightly in a cool murk or rich colour, spreading out her hands as if to caress velvety colours about her in the air. She thought, I am a little drunk. It's nice. (FHD:42-43)

The main point to observe here is the distinction between seeing clearly and not, which is typical in both Murdochian philosophy and her literary symbolism. The change of light (as well as Hilda's tipsiness) causes blurred vision, which can in fact be quite beautiful and enchanting. Murdoch often uses light and dark as symbols of truth and lies, or clear and distorted visions of reality and similar pairs. However, this is not always simple in this novel. Light can signify truth and good, but this is not always to be trusted. Murdoch's use of light and dark is one of the effects which intensify the impression of inversion mentioned above. What seems to be is not necessarily so. In this novel, changes in the light are often more interesting than the actual lighting. Changes express forebodings of the future, or signifiers of the presence of evil or good. This corresponds to what I have already established as the use of inversion (which involves change) as a central aspect of the function of intertextual references.

An important passage follows when Hilda stops in front of an angel-ornamented gilded mirror in the room which, after her eyes are used to the dark, is back to normal lighting. Hilda is seen

indirectly in this passage, as she is described by way of her mirror image. She seems drawn out of natural time and space. The mirror is traditionally a powerful symbol of inversion. The use of reflection, and characters talking (or rather, thinking) to themselves in the mirror, is a subtle way of establishing complex “personalities” in the novel.¹⁶⁰ The mirror as a distortion of reality, and the indirect approach to Hilda which it provides, are indications that she is a much more complex person than the bubbly, slightly silly and rather rude person which has been introduced to so far. The following passage can symbolize the close interaction between the unconscious and conscious mind, which is a theme of many of the characters’ stories.

After a few moments the room began to assemble itself, the cloudy colours to withdraw themselves into familiar surfaces. Hilda looked into the tall round-topped segmented gilt mirror which rose above the mantelpiece to see how her make-up was competing with the sun. A gilded cupid with a ready bow, airborne at the apex, gazes silently down as Hilda burrows in a little brown silk woven vanity bag for lipstick and powder. She peers intently at the thrust out face, radiantly perky, though now perhaps becoming just a little plump. (...) Dark natural curls frame the face and cascade in rings to the neck. The famous angel look. Should not this hair be dyed before the grey becomes too apparent? (FHD:43)

We only see Hilda superficially, but realise that there is more to her than her appearance. The make-up competing with the sun signifies that Hilda is wearing a mask of kinds, that she is playing a role which becomes challenged by the truth (i.e. being exposed to the sun). There are several indications of this, and it is important to the novel. First, the narrator suddenly changes from past to present tense, which brings a strong sense of presence and urgency to Hilda’s thoughts as she looks at herself in the mirror, where much of the focus is on what is changing in her appearance. The relation between past and present self as something which is important to the development of characters in the novel. Although her thoughts do not actually penetrate the superficial level, this impression might be countered by remembering that the mirror-image is an inversion. It might well be, therefore, that Hilda’s wisdom, as yet unknown to herself, is being pointed out here.

Further, there is a reference to Cupid, the god of romantic love, and to Hilda’s “angel-look”, which is fading. Such angelic qualities already have, and will often be, connected with Hilda throughout the novel. Murdoch is known to use angels as symbols of the remnants of uncon-

¹⁶⁰ Such mirror-dialogue can be interpreted as part of the split aspect of selfhood (between ‘idem’ and ‘ipse’) in the Ricoeurian sense. Further, an interpretation of the image with the help of Bakhtinian terminology, can identify the passage as an example of the refraction of reality which happens in close representation, either in the relation between reality and mirror image, or reality and its representation in text. To both these points, see Part IV, Chapter 10.

scious spirituality in the contemporary situation.¹⁶¹ Her philosophy in many ways represents a kind of “spiritual atheism”. The persistent place of vision, Eros, the transcendent and her Buddhist influence are all examples of this. Says Conradi about Murdoch: “Murdoch’s view is (...) that man is a spiritual creature willy-nilly, and her interest is in what is now to happen to such unhoused spirituality”.¹⁶² Here I return to the second theme of the exposition, which was mentioned earlier: what about morality in a world without God? This passage with Hilda and the angel-metaphor might either illustrate or invert an important aspect of Murdoch’s idea of spirituality, which is in a sense both rational and psychological. Spirituality is that which structures our moral thought. In this, she is inspired by Plato. There are, throughout the novel, several hints that Hilda represents untrained rationality in a world of academics, but that she has an unconscious leaning towards seeking goodness. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing, and whether or not she is representative of the quest for goodness, is open to discussion. This characteristic of Hilda is a point of disagreement between the other characters. Some of them value it, others do not. She is in the eyes of some a “natural” being who follows her instinct and breeding, others see her as quite stupid and uneducated. Neither alternative, however, would serve as a guarantee that her choices are good.

In the garden, Axel and Rupert talk about Rupert’s book. Axel is slightly sarcastic about it. What is particularly interesting here, is that Murdoch the philosopher is represented by both the characters’ voices. The book Rupert is trying to write sounds much like parts of her own *The Sovereignty of Good*. Axel’s point of view is also reminiscent of her work. None of them, however, represent her position in full. It is noteworthy that although they disagree quite strongly, this double-barrelled representation actually conveys much of Murdoch’s philosophy:

‘I expect to be told how to live, my dear fellow. I shall take it as my guide to behaviour and follow it slavishly.’ (...)

‘I’m afraid if you want a guide to behaviour you’ll be disappointed, Axel. (...) No philosopher ever did produce a guide to behaviour, even when he thought that that was what he was doing.’

‘So you admit to being a philosopher at last?’

‘No, no. I mean even philosophers are ambiguous so *a fortiori* I am. The thing is just a meditation on a few concepts.’

‘The relation of love to truth and justice and some small matters of that sort, I gather.’

¹⁶¹ See for instance Conradi’s discussion of Murdoch’s novel *The Time of the Angels* (1967) and angel-imagery in this case. Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, pp.167-168. Says Conradi: “Murdoch’s view is (...) that man is a spiritual creature willy-nilly, and her interest is in what is now to happen to such unhoused spirituality”.

¹⁶² Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.169.

‘Some small matters of that sort! But the application must remain for the individual to decide.’

‘Poor individual. No one ever really looks after him. Now what I want is a sort of case book of morals like a guide to etiquette.’ (...)

‘Ordinary people can’t apply philosophy anyway. I doubt if even philosophers can.’

‘People can use moral concepts, as you used the concept of truth just now to persuade me. Anyone can do this.’

‘Maybe. But I think moral philosophy is something hopelessly personal. It just can’t be communicated. “If a lion could talk we would not understand him.” Wittgenstein.’ (FHD:47)

This passage appears to represent what one can imagine is Murdoch’s inner dialogue, where she herself poses a self-critical and ironic view of her own position, *and* a real critique of certain aspects of the two characters’ opinions. This is an important aspect of Murdoch’s work, both philosophical and literary: it includes contradiction, paradox and complexity. To a certain extent this dialogue, both in its structure and subject matter, illustrates a fundamental theme of the novel, namely the ambiguity of the philosopher, which, in fact, Rupert explicitly points out. The discussion above raises several important moral philosophical questions, for instance: what is the role and goal of the philosopher? What is the responsibility of the individual? What can one “do” with moral language? How does one communicate morality? The novel is not a treatise in disguise, but these questions are constantly grappled with at one level or another throughout the text. The dialogic passage above shows clearly how Murdoch develops some of her ideas in the novel-genre in a manner where it would be impossible, or at least difficult, to give philosophical form. It also echoes a classic genre which she has attempted to revitalize, namely the Socratic dialogue as written by Plato.¹⁶³ The attempts all imply a concern with the necessity of including the concept of dialogue at a deep level of form, as well as inherently part of the logic of knowledge.¹⁶⁴

An important symbolic passage in the garden party-chapter occurs when Simon sees a hedgehog.

‘Oh, Hilda! Axel, look! There’s a hedgehog. He’s just peeping out from that delphinium, you can see his nose! A *hedgehog*!’

‘Yes, Simon,’ said Rupert. ‘We meant to tell you about the hedgehog, since you’re so fond of our dumb friends.’

‘Isn’t he sweet? Can you see him Axel? Simon was still, hunching his back, peering

¹⁶³ For instance, Murdoch, Iris: “Art and Eros. A Dialogue about Art” (p. 454-495) and “Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion” (p.496-531) both in: Murdoch: *Existentialists and Mystics*. (These were first published as Murdoch, Iris: *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues*. London 1986).

¹⁶⁴ She thus bravely (but not always successfully) attempts in practice the hermeneutic-dialogic approach to meaning and philosophy which we shall see that Ricoeur and Bakhtin theoretically develop.

shortsightedly and wrinkling up its black moist nose. 'Do you think he'd mind if I picked him up?'

'They're covered with fleas,' said Axel.

'Just for a moment. He's got such a soft furry underside. Now he's trying to curl up, but they never really do it properly, they're such defenceless beasts. Ouf, he *is* prickly. (...) Oh, Hilda, how marvellous to have a hedgehog. Do you often see him? Do you feed him?'

'We put out bread and milk and assume it's him who eats it. I'm terrified he'll fall into the pool.'

'They're terribly stupid animals,' said Axel.

'I'm sure he'd have more sense,' said Simon. (FHD:47-8)

Here a connection between the hedgehog and Simon can be identified: the descriptions of the hedgehog could to a large extent also be applied metaphorically to Simon. This is one of several occasions in the novel in which animals represent humanity. At this stage I need to point out the place and role of the analysis of the "human soul", which in Part V will be represented by the character Morgan – the third of the trio of characters to be discussed later. I have shown that at a certain level this novel is a structured model of the cosmic forces. The grand Biblical narrative has been mentioned. Such cosmic models also occur in Greek tragedies which often portray characters that represent "larger" ideas than their individuality. Tragedies are therefore in part discussions of the relationship between morally relevant ideas (such as hubris, nemesis, or catharsis), as well as being psychologically interesting. If we read this novel as such a text, Morgan is a pawn in this large play of concepts and ideas. However, this does not apply only to Morgan. Simon and Morgan are parallel figures in the novel, and therefore *both* represent the humans whose characters are shaped by the havoc played by good and evil, angels and demons. They both survive the story, and to a certain extent they both develop their moral integrity as a consequence of the narrative. This "double nature" will be reflected in the discussion of Morgan.¹⁶⁵

Animals often occur in the novel in scenes which involve either Morgan or Simon. The hedgehog-passage hints at what will happen to both of them. They act "terribly stupidly" in the novel, but end up having "more sense". The defencelessness combined with prickliness is

¹⁶⁵ On this basis it could be argued that the analysis of "the human soul" in Part V should be made under the heading of not only Morgan, but of Simon as well. This possibility has been considered, and could easily have been defended. However, I have chosen not to, in particular because Murdoch herself poses Morgan as the representative of "the human soul", as we have seen. This must of course be challenged in the analysis of Morgan, as it is impossible to provide an adequate interpretation of her character without including Simon in this. I shall therefore treat Simon and his story and symbolic presence quite extensively in the close reading, and will concentrate explicitly on the situations in which he functions as a parallel figure, or alter ego, to Morgan. These instances will later be reflected in the analysis of Morgan.

an image which is easily applicable to both the characters in question. Hilda worries that the hedgehog will fall into the pool. In the end, it is Rupert who drowns in the pool. This reference in a sense will become the ultimate proof of his humanity, the fact which he ignores and which will lead to his downfall.

The conversation about the hedgehog precedes Morgan's unexpected arrival. She is in a state of shock, and very confused. Her distress is the point of departure for her narrative, which is one of the most central of the novel: "'I don't know what I'm doing,' said Morgan. 'I don't know where I'm going. I have no plans. I have no intentions. I have no thoughts. I have just got off a jet plane and I feel crazy.'" (FHD:50) These black and muddled emotions are the background for her actions and reflections throughout the story, and reflect the unintelligibility of the human condition of which the individual has to make some sense. Morgan's (as well as Simon's) story constitutes much of the novel, and in a sense she (they) is (are) the main character(s).

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The three chapters of the exposition have now come to what I see as a logical end. The introductory chapters take place in a temporal unity and have thematic coherence. The arrival of Morgan disrupts this unity, and therefore terminates the exposition. From now on, the threads of the stories go in different directions. Sometimes they are woven into each other, sometimes they follow parallel or conflicting paths. It is not until the end of the novel that a sense of "totality" is resolved in the story and its characters as has been the case in the exposition. This totality has been reflected in my discussion of themes, symbols and references which permeate the whole novel. This introductory analysis will to a certain extent serve as a point of reference throughout the rest of the close reading. My observations, interpretations and comments will, however, take on new shapes and colours as the reading of the novel proceeds. In particular, I wish to show how Murdoch has constructed the novel as a dialogic text, in more ways than one. Her patterning of the story, plot and images, both internally and in relation to other texts, can seem somewhat artificial from my presentation of them. I have sought and found more sense of constructedness in this reading than what exists in the text itself.

b) An Encounter of Evil and Good (Chapter 6)

After the exposition, the next interpretative pause in the text takes place at Chapter 6, in which there are two, or rather, three aspects of particular importance for the interpretation of the novel with respect to the forthcoming discussions of character and moral authority. The

first is the inside glimpse of the relationship between Axel and Simon, portrayed both by the dialogue and the narrator's rendering of Simon's thoughts and emotions. *Secondly*, this is where both Tallis and Julius are introduced in person and meet each other for the first time. Tallis and Julius often appear or are mentioned at the same time. There are several parallelisms between the two, but they are often (in fact, usually) presented as opposites. They are both deeply connected to Morgan, as respectively husband and lover. Although they do not exactly fight over her, the novel nevertheless displays a struggle between two very different powers, and the beginnings of this struggle can be seen in their very first meeting. The *third* point to be aware of, is that although dialogue dominates in this chapter, the focalized consciousness is Simon's, thus positioning him as a centre of consciousness in this chapter with regard to the symbolic, emotional and real battle for power which takes place between 'good' and 'evil'.

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Simon and Axel are preparing a dinner to which they have invited Julius. They squabble before he arrives. The scene is very intimate. Simon is so far the only character who is portrayed as being directly afraid of, and negative towards, Julius. He is worried that compared to the fascinating Julius, Axel will find Simon unworthy of his love: "In the last few days he had lost Axel in any of a dozen different ways, all somehow connected with Julius." (FHD:76) Much of the chapter consists of Simon's worrying. He worries that the evening will be a disaster, that he himself is a vulgar, shallow person, and that Axel will leave him. This is central to a recognition of Simon's central character traits. That he is a "worrier" is an important background to the scenes in which the reader has no access to his inner life, and where he comes across as a naughty, happy, rather silly art historian with a promiscuous background.

At one point the narrator intervenes in Simon's train of thought. Although the focalization is close, the narrator's analysis is from an external point of view: "Simon had very little sense of his own identity and often it seemed to him that he only existed at all by virtue of Axel's love which was directed by what must be a mistake upon this almost-nothing." (FHD:77) Simon himself would be unlikely to consciously use the phrase "little sense of his own identity". He does, however, admit elsewhere that Axel's love seems to be the ground of his existence, thus, in a sense, placing his identity in his relationship. This is interesting from a Murdochian point of view. In *The Sovereignty of Good*, she argues that "Love is knowledge of the individual" (SOG:28). Being seen and known as a real individual, i.e. to be loved, is in a sense what

it means to exist.¹⁶⁶ As will be developed as a sub-plot of the novel, Simon's story is one of "becoming", or, in other words, his gradual awakening to a true sense of self. His experiences of loving and being loved are central to this plot.

However, Axel's love for Simon does not, in fact, come across as the kind of selfless seeing love that in a Murdochian sense is a virtue, and which would, according to the point made above, be a necessary ground for Simon's existence. That their relationship in this sense is not perfect, could correspond to, and might even be seen as an illustration of another of Murdoch's statements about love, namely that "human love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too 'mechanical' to be a place of vision" (SOG:75). Axel often comes across as being patronizing and condescending, and Simon's sense of self is therefore not enhanced by being with his partner (particularly not if Julius is around). Thus, the relationship between the two men portrays a twofold image of love: there *is* an "ideal" love in a Murdochian sense which is present in the text by virtue of the realism and truthfulness in the portrayal of the couple (to see lovingly is to see truthfully). This realism includes the flawed characteristics of real human love, thereby also the possessiveness and jealousy between them. A hint to understanding the second aspect of the portrayal of their love as a possible embodiment of Murdochian ideals, occurs after the quarrel:

[Simon] felt his waist being encircled from behind. He had learnt from experience that Axel liked him to remain impassive on such occasions. He pushed the saucepan onto the glowing ring. Axel was beginning to pull him round.

Simon regarded him coldly.

"When I lie tangled in your hair and fettered to your eye, The birds that wanton in the air know no such liberty."

'Good show,' said Simon.

Sometimes they exchanged roles. (FHD:78)

Two aspects of this conversation are central to the understanding of love in the narration of Axel and Simon's relationship. First, the erotic little game they play in the passage above represents the importance of sexual love, or Eros. Earlier, Simon has pointed out that sexual love is the only redeeming grace (FHD:41). This may be seen as a development of what Murdoch (in continuation of Plato), says about Eros, or desire. Eros (as desire, not necessarily sexual) is in itself a neutral force, neither good nor bad. It is, however, a force that can direct

¹⁶⁶ An important aspect of a theological anthropology, is that as humans, we *receive before we act*. The analysis of this scene is therefore relevant to a theological interpretation of the problem of moral authority. Ricoeur develops this philosophically, in his insistence that action cannot be understood out of context with interaction, as we shall see developed in Part IV, Chapter 10.2., and that ethics has as its base a fundamental reciprocity of self and other.

the individual's focus *away* from self, thus enabling attention to the other. Sexual love can therefore, according to Murdoch, have the power of "spiritually cleansing" the individual.¹⁶⁷ Further, this view of desire as "redeeming grace", is very different from the future passion between Rupert and Morgan. This Eros is destructive, precisely because it is *not* directed towards the other. Their "love" is fundamentally self-enhancing, and arises from vanity. This is not, at least not always, the case concerning Simon and Axel.

Secondly, the exchange of roles is a symbol of a relationality which is a vital aspect of morality. For instance, considering Hilda and Rupert's relationship, there is a rigidity of role which prevents one from seeing from the other's perspective. Murdoch, with reference to Buber, points out that an important aspect of love and morality is that of seeing the otherness of self, and self in the other. (MGM:468)¹⁶⁸ Simon and Axel's playful reversal of roles thus symbolizes their ability to "see truthfully", i.e. beyond the ego. These two characteristic aspects of the relationship between Axel and Simon (i.e. the sexual passion, and their fluidity of role) might be an indication of why Julius manages to bring destruction to the other couples, but not to this one.

When Julius arrives at their house for dinner, he utters his very first words in the novel. They are said to Axel, but flirtatiously directed towards Simon: "'I must say, Axel,' said Julius, 'when I heard that you had taken up with this brown-eyed beauty I did feel the tiniest bit jealous!' He beamed at Simon through his spectacles." (FHD:78) Simon feels very uncomfortable in the situation, and senses the manipulative force of Julius. However, he is utterly powerless in relation to Julius and Axel. This is relevant to the themes of powerlessness and gradual empowerment in Simon's story, which are further aspects of his process of "becoming".

Further, Julius's comment comes as a surprise to the reader, as he has so far been portrayed as a heterosexual. His apparent bisexuality could indicate that he represents some kind of other-worldly presence, a cosmic force, a destructive Eros. Not in the sense that bi-sexuality is not a 'human' trait, but that his sexuality seems somewhat a-sexual throughout the novel in its lack of directedness and embodiment (I shall return to this several times). Such an interpretation gains force in that it also applies to Tallis, who appears to be heterosexual, but has a vague erotic (but distant and unembodied) encounter with Peter. That they are "above" sexuality

¹⁶⁷ Murdoch: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p.24-25. (Hereafter referred to in the body text as MGM).

¹⁶⁸ This is, as we shall see, close to Ricoeurian and Bakhtinian perspectives on selfhood as an inherently relational construction.

strengthens the impression that they are otherworldly presences. Both men can therefore be seen to represent passion and desire, but the force they generate in the novel is directed in different directions. Julius's power forces the characters to focus inwards on themselves, while Tallis's presence and force tugs in an outwards motion.

Much of the following text is devoted to the narrator describing the scene in detail. Appearances, the food and the conversation are all given careful attention. Significantly, the narrator tells us that "The dining room was lit only by six tall black candles in the two Sheffield plate candlesticks" (FHD:78). This gothic atmosphere symbolizes the presence of a malign nature. This is one of this chapter's several indications that Julius is a demonic, supernatural and destructive presence. As for dialogue, Axel and Julius do most of the talking. For a while they discuss astrology, which enhances the gothic, or at least, mystic mood. All the characters' astrological signs are revealed (apart from Leonard's). An analysis of these illuminates the roles and interrelatedness of the characters, and also enhances some of the recurring symbolism in the novel.¹⁶⁹

Tallis is a *Capricorn* (22 December onwards). This indicates that Tallis represents Christ, as Christmas is the time of the incarnation, the birth of the Son of God.¹⁷⁰ In continuation of this, the lack of information concerning Leonard's sign is interesting. Leonard is Tallis's father. In this context, it makes sense that he can be interpreted as a transfiguration of God the Father, and thus, with respect to astrology: "above" the stars. (Leonard as the Godhead is a motif that will be developed further as the narrative proceeds.) However, the lack of zodiacal identification in this case also carries weight in the sense that it communicates Leonard's insignificance. He is a very "low" character, hardly worth mentioning together with the others. This is relevant to the strand of the novel which concerns the quest for a morality without God.

Julius is *Leo*. In much folklore, the lion is the animal king. Animals represent humanity in the novel, and the image of the "lion king" therefore signifies the power Julius has over the hu-

¹⁶⁹ For this analysis, I have deliberately not done any research on the Zodiac. In this case, I have wanted to show how an immediacy of association (based only on a vague knowledge of astrology) can convey some of the fuzzy and subjective response to symbolism which is necessarily part of any reading. The meaning-making process will always be particular to the reader. Some bells chime stronger than others. On the other hand, as a critic, it is important to strive not only for identification, but to be aware of what is different from and challenges one's own interpretative perspective – and bias. (In my case, this probably involves a sharper eye for symbols from a Christian tradition, while Conradi, for instance, sees Murdoch's novels as influenced by Romantic Opera.)

¹⁷⁰ In Murdoch's notes to the novel Tallis's birthday was to be 25 December. This is not the case in the final text. The symbolism has been obscured, but is still present. Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.205.

mans. Here is an obvious connection with Julius's second name, which is King. (Apropos this: Leo is short for Leonard, which can be another indication that Leonard also represents kingship in a certain manner.) In astrological tradition, a Leo is often portrayed as a leader, the active figure at the centre of action. Julius is the main protagonist in the novel. It is through his powers that the story can happen. Finally, Leo's star is the sun, which in a Murdochian context is a symbol of good. These references both to Leonard and Julius (God and the Devil) communicates an ambiguity as to who, or what, is good.

Morgan is *Gemini*. In the first chapter (FHD:21), we learn that Tallis lost his twin sister when he was fourteen. In a sense, Morgan represents this missing twin, who makes Tallis complete. It is primarily in relation to Morgan (the human soul) that Tallis (the idea of the good), becomes "real". Together, they represent both aspects of Murdochian good – the idea of perfection, and the human experience of it. That their love, their marriage, has broken up, is an indication that the integration of the two aspects is an almost impossible feat. This motif recurs throughout the novel. However, Morgan does not only complement Tallis. There are scenes where she and Simon are almost interchangeable and have the same function in the story. This, as has been pointed out, is deeply significant to an interpretation of Morgan. The twin-motif can therefore be extended to include Simon. Simon is *Sagittarius*, and the only one of the signs in this presentation that, at least to me, has no obvious significance. This is interesting with respect to the discussion of Simon's self-experience as being insignificant (which was shown above).

Rupert and Axel are both *Cancer*. They are the only two who share a sign. Axel and Rupert are often coupled in the novel, which is significant to an interpretation of them. They are both civil servants, they are both masculine (Axel is "male" in his relationship with Simon), they both went to Oxford, are the same age and they are both ardent lovers of philosophical debate although they often disagree. Further, 'cancer' has a double connotation. The first is the crab, the only animal referred to in the novel that does not live on land, which can be a reference to Rupert's death. He drowns in the pool at the end of the novel. The other connotation (although not an astrological image) is to the illness, the "evil" growth within. They are both infected by the cancerous Julius, although Axel survives and Rupert does not.

Hilda is *Virgo*, the virgin. This indicates innocence and refers to the virgin mother, the saint. "The innocent" also points towards the often mentioned angelic quality of Hilda, and to her untrained mind and spirituality. She is also the innocent victim of Rupert and Morgan's affair. Peter is an *Aquarius*. This is the antiauthoritarian sign. It is anti tradition, and it is the sign of

expectancy. A central notion of the late sixties (in which the novel is set), was the belief in the dawning of The Age of Aquarius, in which a new rationality, new faith and new spirituality was (by many) expected to emerge. Throughout the novel, Peter passively waits for this newness to take place. In doing this, he drives his parents to mild desperation.

During the dinner and conversation, Tallis arrives unexpectedly. This is the first meeting between Julius and Tallis. This meeting is quite likely to be parallel in time to an earlier narrated scene in which Morgan worries about them ever meeting: “Somehow I couldn’t bear it if they met. It would be frightfully destructive, like some huge catastrophe in outer space.” (FHD:62) When Tallis rings the door bell, Axel exclaims in language which is uncharacteristically strong: “Who the devil can that be? (...) calling on us so late at night. Go and tell them to go to hell, Simon.” (FHD:82) Simon finds that he cannot tell Tallis to “go to hell”. However, because the Satanic Julius is inside (which could indicate a hellish location), Axel (so to speak) invites him into hell. Immediately after Tallis has left, Axel’s reaction is “Oh God.” In the light of his last words before Tallis came in, they are significant. Tallis is led into the dining room, and introduced to Julius:

‘Julius, we’ve got a visitor. This is Tallis Browne. Julius King.’

Julius rose. He was considerably taller than Tallis.

Tallis stared at Julius and visibly shuddered. Then he took a step forward and held out his hand. ‘Hello.’

With a marked raising of the eyebrows Julius took the proffered hand. ‘Good evening’. Julius sat down. (FHD:83)

When Tallis and Julius meet, Tallis shudders. The catastrophe Morgan predicted has been initiated. The shudder could, of course, be the rejected husband’s reaction to meeting his wife’s lover. At a certain level of reading, this is surely the case. However, there is more to it than that. The meeting of the two is the clash of powers, the incompatibility of good and evil. Their words of greeting are very different, and significant: the meek meets the powerful. Tallis’s casual and simple ‘Hello’ is responded to with a cool and mannered ‘Good evening’. The atmosphere is extremely tense:

Simon and Axel sat down, Simon sitting a little away from the table behind Tallis, his arm on the back of Tallis’s chair. Julius, who had pushed his chair back as if to have a better view, was regarding Tallis with a slightly sardonic and yet friendly air, the corners of his long mouth quivering very slightly and turning upward. Axel was frowning and showing his teeth as he did when he was anxious. Tallis drank some of the wine out of Simon’s glass as if this were a grave and almost ritualistic action, his eyes lowered and his attention fixed to the glass. He had long orange eyelashes. There was a short silence which Julius was very evidently enjoying. (FHD:84)

Julius' smile at Tallis is curiously described as being "sardonic and yet *friendly*" (my italics). This is an odd phrase in the situation, and rather confusing. It could mean that Julius is a more complex figure than simply a personification of evil (which certainly is true). Most people are charmed by him, and a certain friendliness is evident. This is, however, not an unfamiliar aspect of the seductiveness of evil. On the other hand, this could also indicate deep irony. Julius is very manipulative, and friendliness makes him seem less dangerous. According to the narrator, he enjoys the uncomfortable situation. This is not a pleasant characteristic. He signals power, and it is definitely Julius who is in control of the situation.

Tallis comes across with less power. However, he has a strong ritualistic presence. He drinks Simon's wine, which, in the context, can be seen as a reference to the ritual of Holy Communion. It is, however, inverted: the Christ-figure reverently drinks the wine of the human. Reference to ritual is not uncommon in scenes that involve Tallis and/or Julius. Such reference is subtle, and most of these situations have a strong ambiguity. The rituals could either belong to a Mass or Black Mass. When Tallis leaves, it is with what seems like a priest's benediction: "With a wave of farewell which vaguely embraced the room Tallis disappeared" (FHD:85). It is not a powerful gesture, but the impression is that Tallis leaves the room in honour. In a sense, the title of the novel could apply to this single scene: Tallis's "fairly honourable defeat".

Julius is very condescending towards Tallis, and comments: "What a very strange little person (...) He ought to be sitting on a toadstool." (FHD:85) He brings to mind an image of a magician casting a spell on Tallis. Tallis is, through Julius' words, reduced to a strange little person, a gnome with no dignity. This image corresponds to his appearance. Tallis is smaller than Julius, and has orange colouring and a bumpy face. These are unusual adjectives in a description of a man. They make associations of something different, some humanoid figure, maybe, but not a real human. In the conversation after Tallis has left, the men agree that Tallis and Julius ought not to have shaken hands. When Tallis stretches out his hand towards Julius', it is a symbol of meekness. He is on the verge of disowning his own honour after having been cuckolded by Julius. From this scene, the impression of Tallis is ambiguous. He comes across as being both honourable and dishonoured. This is typical of the Tallis-character throughout the novel. Is he meek, dignified and selfless, or is he just weak, pathetic and spineless?

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To conclude the close reading of this chapter: the ethical significance has been threefold. For one, it has thrown some light on the reciprocal nature of human relationships, and thus dialogic constructions of selfhood and identity. This, as shall be thematised by help of the concept of ‘character’ in Part V, has strong ethical implications in the sense that ethics is always about reflective responsiveness to human, historical situations of action and suffering. Specifically, the text in this respect makes clear in what way the relationship between Axel and Simon is good, although they quarrel throughout the novel. Secondly, this chapter also paves the way for the beginning of my interpretations of Julius and Tallis as representations of evil and good, which will provide material for a substantial discussion of the problem of moral authority. Thirdly, the issue of moral perspectivity and particular voices as being ethically relevant is illustrated and developed through our growing familiarity with Simon.

c) The Notting Hill Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit (Chapter 9)

This chapter has been selected for close scrutiny on account of its thorough and important contribution to character portrayal. This is particularly significant because of the symbolic structure within which these portrayals take place. I have earlier argued that the novel in its totality can be seen as a religious allegory. I shall in this chapter show how the characters here represent and invert the deeply Christian image and interpretation of God as Trinity. It is important to recall that the Trinitarian conception of God (and its present distortion) is fundamentally relational. The dysfunctional relations between the characters in this chapter thus serve as an important comment on Murdoch’s postulated death of God, or at least, a comment on God’s insignificance and irrelevance in modern ethical discourse. The chapter concerns the three men who live in Tallis’s house in Notting Hill, namely Leonard, Tallis and Peter. Together, they represent a symbolic triad: Leonard is the (dying) Father, Tallis the (muddled) Son, and Peter is the free spirit (who rebels against all authority and the rules of society). The three men are all in a state of crisis. The chapter is divided into three textual units, in all of which Tallis is present, thus positioning him at the “centre” of the Trinity, so to speak. The first section shows Tallis in conversation with Leonard. Then follows a section with Tallis alone, and finally there is a section with Tallis and Peter. Throughout the chapter the focalization is Tallis’s. The impression created is of an unhappy, lonely and very confused man.

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To begin with, Tallis and Leonard are in the filthy kitchen. It is late evening. The atmosphere of the room has symbolic significance: “The window was wide open and the electric light

revealed a square segment of caked and crumbling brick wall just outside”. (FHD:105) The electric light is a false light compared to sunlight. Electric light is often mentioned, or referred to, in situations where the characters are in the depth of confusion and unhappiness. The view from the window is very limited. The false light, the filthiness of the kitchen and the old, decaying wall outside the window are all symbols of impaired vision, of not being able to see clearly. The situation is thus a variation of the Platonic allegory of the cave, with evidence of the false light and a wall on which shadows can dance.¹⁷¹

Tallis is trying to write a lecture but cannot concentrate, because Leonard rants unstoppably and unpleasantly. The opening words of the chapter are Leonard’s, and are typical of his deep cynicism and hatred of the squalor of human life. He brings to mind an old-testament prophet, and more or less directly echoes the book of Job, the apocalypse and other Biblical texts in which waste-lands represent the lack of divine presence, for instance the parable of the Prodigal Son.¹⁷²

‘What are they for after all but to kiss the foot that kicks them in the teeth? And when they’ve had the boils and the cattle have died and they’re scraping themselves with potsherds or whatever, though what that’s like and why I’ve never been able to make out, I suppose if one hadn’t any soap one might try to scrape the dirt off like when you scrape the mud off an old boot, not that there’s any point of talking about soap to you, or potsherds either if it comes to that, since you never wash and go around like an old sheep with a filthy tail, and after all that and the damned irrelevant rubbish about the elephants and the whales and the morning stars and so on, there they are still whining and grovelling and enjoying being booted in the face – My toes are itching like hell. What do you think that’s a symptom of?’

‘Itching toes,’ said Tallis. (FHD:105)

The dirt and filth, and references to trying to cleanse by use of potsherds (as in Job), are all images of the squalor and/or sinfulness of humanity. In many Murdoch novels, bathing in the sea is a symbol of shedding the filth of life and becoming clean.¹⁷³ However, in this novel dirt/cleanliness are ambiguous symbols. The ambiguity is implied in that it is distorted Leonard-God who uses the image. Tallis is always dirty and unkempt, as is his house. Julius, by contrast, is rigidly tidy and clean. Swimming in the Foster’s pool is likewise an ambiguous image of cleansing. Simon swims almost every day and loves the water. Julius is shoved into the pool but cannot swim, and Rupert drowns in it. In this novel, therefore, images of filth are not so much symbols of evil as of goodness. Water does not in itself have cleansing powers.

¹⁷¹ I shall discuss the significance of Plato’s allegory in depth in Part IV, Chapter 11.

¹⁷² Luke 15:11-31.

¹⁷³ For instance in Murdoch. *Iris: The Sea, the Sea*, London 1978 and Murdoch, *Iris: The Nice and the Good*. London 1968.

However, being able to swim is important.¹⁷⁴ There is no magic formula for spiritual cleansing. It is hard work.

The dirt-motif reoccurs several times. Leonard likens Tallis to “a filthy old sheep”. This is a distortion of the Agnus Dei-motif. Tallis’s Christ-likeness is strongly linked to such imagery, in that he often is seen to “carry the sins of the world” on his shoulders. For instance, his work among the “less fortunate”, and his sense of wanting to sort out all the relationships that have gone wrong (but not knowing how to do this), are all actions with sacrificial aspects. This reappears at the point later in the novel where Tallis is reminiscent of the suffering servant, when he pushes a hand-cart full of Morgan’s possessions in a long and struggling journey through London. (This image also echoes the story of Christ carrying his cross to his own execution.)

Another important aspect of the passage above concerns Leonard’s use of pronouns. Who are “they”? It is likely to be a reference to humanity, from which Leonard distances himself. In a later passage, he ruminates about why humans never stop warring, and comments: “Of course, it all went wrong from the start.” (FHD:106). His omniscience here gives the impression of someone who has seen the whole of history, but who has become disillusioned at the end of time.

Their further conversation brings the past of the Browne family into play, and gives necessary background to Tallis’s psychological state. His mother ran away when Tallis and his twin sister were five. His life has been full of suffering, growing up in an environment of verbal, physical and sexual abuse. In addition to this, he has a history of abandonment by the women of his life: his mother, sister (who is said to have committed suicide) and wife. Tallis has distanced himself from reality, and is in a deep emotional muddle. Leonard comments: “You live in a dream world” (FHD: 110). He does not at all recognize the fact that he himself may be the cause of some of the tragedy. He certainly takes no responsibility. The relationship between Leonard and Tallis is a total opposite of the perfect father-son-relationship. Thus, the Trinitarian relation is distorted. There is no perfection. There is only destruction and perversion. Leonard interestingly comments when Tallis points out that it is after eleven thirty p.m.: “It isn’t in Australia. It isn’t on the moon. So it can’t be true here.” (FHD:109). This could be an ironic reference to modern conceptions of relativity. In such a vulgar understanding, noth-

¹⁷⁴ This is true of all Murdoch’s novels: “To be able to swim, for Murdoch, is almost to possess moral competence.” Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.138.

ing is true any more, and this has destroyed the possibility of religion. Leonard/God is the one to point this out, as if to prove that his life has been a great mistake.

After the conversation in the kitchen, Tallis goes to bed. In his room, he pulls the blind down, and sits in the darkness on his divan picking his nose. This is a very private image, creating an atmosphere of complete loneliness. It is embarrassing and uncomfortable. All Tallis's defences are down. The following quotation is a brilliantly written passage, in my opinion one of the best in the novel. It does what literary language can do, both prose and poetry, that philosophy cannot. It shows the confusion of real life, the fragments of understanding mixed with deep emotions, with life and death and grief. This is part of the reality of the human soul. It depicts the murkiness of our inner worlds, the secret, the hidden aspect of self:

The room was small and narrow and the bed, which stretched along the wall, took up most of it. There were no sheets, but a mound of thin blankets underneath which Tallis slept in winter and on top of which he slept in summer. Books were piled against the other wall. Tallis pulled his legs up and leaned back. He could not think without a table. Better give up and sleep now. Get up early and finish lecture. Better not thoughts now. Sleep. Unbeing. No point in kneeling down, folding hands, muttering. Self-abasement, prostration, licking the ground and wriggling through. Tears and sex. God, what a muck-heap my mind is, thought Tallis. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe slowly and regularly. Words came without volition, sinking very slowly through his mind like pebbles. Words out of some lost and ancient past. Lighten my darkness. Tiddy pom tiddy pom tiddy pom from up above. The perils and dangers of this night. With his eyes closed he uncurled his legs and turned over to lie prone on the bed, burying his face in the pillow. That peace which the world cannot give. There was light somewhere, cool precious light, somewhere quite else. The pillow smelt of dust and age and grief. It was an old pillow. It had attended upon life and death and birth and was tired of them all. It had no pillow slip on and it tickled Tallis' nose. Get undressed and turn out light. Idiotic go to sleep like this. (FHD:110)

The passage is sad and disturbing. The odd grammatical constructions convey some of this impression. It is the "deepest" the reader ever enters into one of the character's minds. It is also an important example of a difference between Tallis and Julius. While this passage gives access to a Tallis more subjectively, personally and privately portrayed than any of the others ever are, Julius remains throughout the novel the most objectively portrayed. He is the mysterious and unknown. The narrative style in this section is for the most part a "stream of consciousness". This puts the reader in close touch with Tallis's state of desperation, confusion, depression and loneliness. Interestingly, the narrator's otherwise objective and external voice merges here with Tallis's most private inner life. This shift from external to internal narration happens quite suddenly. First the room is described, and then the focus is moved to Tallis. He

slips in and out of consciousness, and the narrator slips in and out of his mind. This technique conveys some very deep visual and almost wordless images of reality.

Prayer is an important image in the passage. This is a recurring theme in Murdoch's philosophy. She compares her key phrase 'attention' to religious prayer.¹⁷⁵ As such, it is a form of consciousness directed to something or someone completely *other* than oneself. Such otherness is textually evident above. The visual images of language in the passage, corresponds to classic Platonic and Christian dualistic images of 'above and below', 'transcendent and immanent': words come to Tallis from *above*. He is wordless on the *ground*. There is a clear conception of there being a real "somewhere else" outside human life reality. A "place" with peace and cool light "which the world cannot give". This corresponds with the Biblical background, which is echoed, yet elusive. The idea of what *could have been heaven* seems empty, and is replaced by an ideal reality which can only be seen by focusing one's attention to good. However, this too is elusive to Tallis. The visual image of the structure of reality is strongly present in Murdoch's moral philosophy. For instance, it is by attending to the idea of good "outside" or "above" human life that one sheds the ego, and thereby is enabled to face true reality. To pray is a model of consciously directing one's attention to this otherness. Tallis, however, has no conscious control of his inner life, although he tries to. His prayer therefore is, and is not, an example of Murdochian 'attention'. Tallis prays, but his prayer is not directed anywhere. He cannot find this "other" which he senses is there. He has vague images of something elsewhere, a light and a peace that he himself does not have. There is no God in this novel. The prayer is therefore nothing but loose phrases out of context. He cannot kneel, fold hands or even "mutter". But yet, shadows of the words are there. They seem to exist, even if they are distorted and meaningless to him. The repetition of "tidy pom" indicates that the words are forgotten, but present somewhere deep inside of him, or far beyond him. They are "dead" words in his vocabulary, yet he uses them, or rather, they come to him, and "fall like pebbles".

At one point, Tallis sees himself as a snake-like being. The image is indicated by the words "licking the ground and wriggling through", which belong in the context of the non-prayer. The self-abasement is different to unselfing.¹⁷⁶ This is Tallis in his own private hell. For Tallis this hellish condition is a consequence of being rejected by his father and by other loved ones. This is yet another parallel to Christ. During his three days in the land of death, or hell, he is

¹⁷⁵ "Prayer is properly not petition, but simply an attention to God which is a form of love." SOG:55.

¹⁷⁶ See to this the discussion of Murdochian 'unselfing' in Part IV, Chapter 11.

completely rejected by his father. Again the dualistic structure comes into play. Several of the images in this passage are disturbing both to Tallis and to the reader. How can this “muck-heap” of a mind represent goodness? This is significant, because it shows that Tallis cannot be interpreted purely as a symbol of the good, just as Julius is not only a representation of evil. Life and literature are far too complex for such simple interpretations. The issue is, rather, *how* the characters handle the complexity and muddle of the ego.

Following the prayer-passage, Tallis “sees” his sister, not for the first time. Morgan has earlier pointed out to Rupert that Tallis’s vision is not normal, that he “sees things”. Murdoch’s use of magical realism creates a different kind of world by which she can comment on reality. According to Conradi, “she does not argue for a choice between ‘realism’ on the one hand and ‘myth’ on the other, but for a dialectic or mediation between them.”¹⁷⁷ The imagery transcends normality. In this way she provides readers with symbols, with forms and structures by which one can think dialectically and see beyond what is rational. Such visual imagery belongs to the unconscious and imaginative mind, not the logical thinking mind:

His sister was standing at the foot of the bed dressed in a long dress. There were visitants from another world by whose presence he was sometimes troubled and perplexed and more rarely delighted. These he knew were minor presences, riff raff of consciousness. This was different. She came with a vividness which was not that of a dream, yet always at these still moments and at night. Sometimes he felt she cheated him of other things. She interposed. Was it protection? She wore a long robe of a pale colour. She must have altered with the years, growing older with him, but he could not clearly remember. She was silent and yet seemed to speak. Perhaps she spoke to some part of him of which he knew nothing. She looked and yet he could not see her eyes. He was always very quiet when she came, pinned down, heavy, glad and yet a little frightened too. (FHD:111)

Tallis sees the sighting of his sister as real, yet he questions his own perception. There is much deep symbolism in this passage. Tallis’s sister can be interpreted as being an alter ego, or his shadow in a Jungian sense. This is suggested by the quality of the vision, which is a strange mixture between otherness and sameness, of unreality and reality. She has changed in time with him, but he has not consciously been aware of this, and he suspects her of speaking to his unconscious self. According to Jung, the shadow is the constant companion, the negative side to reality, the lost and unconscious.¹⁷⁸ The sister is what Tallis is not, but she is not completely distant.

¹⁷⁷ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.27.

¹⁷⁸ Jung on the shadow, cited from <http://psikoloji.fisek.com.tr/jung/shadow.htm> (17.09.2004): “Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or

It is possible to interpret Morgan as a physical realization of Tallis's shadow. Morgan is Gemini, the astrological twin, which indicates her symbolic closeness to Tallis, and a substitute for his lost sister. Because Morgan represents "the human soul", the relationship between Morgan and Tallis is of the utmost importance. They are married, they should ideally be a unity, but have not managed to keep the relationship healthy. This distortion of unity, the unbalance of identification and difference in his relationships, is an aspect of Tallis and his goodness that is very central to the plot of the novel. In having lost so many of his loved ones (both emotionally and physically), Tallis has in a sense become disembodied. He has lost his connection to reality. As the personification of good, this is significant. Tallis is abstract, he lives in his dream world. He is like the idea of good about which Rupert is writing his book, which through Rupert's narrative and final death is proven to be unsatisfactory. It stays disembodied, unrelated to real life. Tallis and Morgan's marriage is a symbol of good, and its failure is thus a symbol of the lack of connection between context and ideals. The bond is difficult, and almost impossible.

Vision and sight are much used metaphors in Murdoch's work, both philosophical and literary. Tallis notices that "she looked, and yet he could not see her eyes". His inability to see his sister's eyes is an indication of the difficulty of focusing attention on the other in a relationship. In Murdochian terminology, love and vision are close images. There is a parallel to this later, when Morgan goes to see Tallis, and tries very hard not to look at him. Morgan and Tallis's relationship can be interpreted in such a light. Morgan has never really been able to "see" Tallis. She tells Hilda: "Tallis has got no inner life, no real conception of himself, there's a sort of emptiness." (FHD:60) This observation can be seen from two angles. First, Tallis has not shown himself to her. It could be said that in this he represents the idea of 'unselfing'. However, 'unselfing' does not mean to have no being, no identity. It is to look beyond oneself, but not to *be* nothing. Thus, Tallis is in a sense transcendent, inaccessible to the human soul. Secondly, in the above mentioned conversation with Hilda, it is significant that Morgan uses the word "see" a great many times. For instance, when she speaks about her emotional situation, she says: "(...) at the moment I can see nothing. I can't see myself, I can't see my marriage" (FHD:57). Yet she admits to having *seen* Tallis in her mind the whole time while

wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected." ("Psychology and Religion" (1938). In CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East. P.131)

she was away: “I used to see those big light brown eyes looking at me, I used to see them at night in the dark” (FHD:58). These words are echoed in Tallis’s vision of his sister, in which he looks at her but cannot see her eyes. There is a sense in which he can see others only when he is in his unreal dream world, or when he is not physically present. Further, Morgan describes his eyes in a manner very similar to the description of Jesse Baltram’s eyes in *The Good Apprentice*.¹⁷⁹ They both have an unreal, sentimental kitsch-Christ quality.

After the sighting of his sister, Tallis sits up. The brightness of the room is an indication of the stark truthfulness of insight of the following passage. This is the first time Tallis is a truly credible human, with recognizable human feelings of sorrow, fear, hope and despair. There is in this passage, therefore, evidence of both Tallis’s humanity and of his non-human qualities. The ambiguity in Tallis’s character parallels the incarnated Christ’s double nature, as true God and true man.

It was too bright. (...) The room was filled with the appalling thought of Morgan. While she had been inconceivably far away the thing had been bearable. Now he felt crippled with pain that she had returned to England and had not come straight to him. Yet why should he have expected this? He had not really expected anything, he thought, during the time that she was away. (...) It was if she had been translated to another planet. There was no spatial tug any more between them. Yet he must all the time have retained his hope and thought of himself still as being her home and the natural ground of her being.

Now that she was back, every day and every hour of her silence turned that hope into torture. She was no longer outside the world. (...) He knew that for the moment he could do nothing. He just thought about her and about the past. They had known it would be difficult. The tender humble consciousness of difficulty, of distance, had always been a part of their love. Yet it had seemed the beginning of a great enterprise. (FHD:111).

This passage is particularly relevant with respect to problems of moral language. When Morgan went off with Julius, Tallis imagined her as being “translated to another planet”. It is interesting that a linguistic term is used to indicate this transition in Morgan’s life (she is a professional linguist). As she is the personification of the human soul, this brings attention to a view of language as being fundamental to humanity. A translated text is different from the original, yet from another point of view, the meaning is ideally the same. The use of the term ‘translation’ can therefore indicate that in Tallis’s mind, Morgan did not cease belonging to his reality, although she was “outside his world”. The hope that he was still her “home” and “ground of being” is shattered, and becomes torture for him. Through connotations with the

¹⁷⁹ Murdoch, Iris: *The Good Apprentice*. London 1985, p.191.

concept of translation, one could say that the actual Morgan “became another text”. Morgan’s context changes, and this “translated Morgan” is foreign to Tallis. It is arguable that part of Tallis’s “honourable defeat” in the novel is his failure to reunite with Morgan. That their relationship was based on distance, recognizing the other’s otherness, could correspond with Murdoch’s views on the ideal relationship. It thus also corresponds to the hermeneutic theory introduced in Part II of the thesis, in which it is in the “dialogue of difference” that meaning gains authority. Had they succeeded in returning to the marriage, this ideal relationship between the transcendent and immanent would be achieved. However, that this proves to be a difficult task is part of the novel’s deep insight. The ideal balance, or juxtaposition, of ideal and context is not achieved. Therefore, the story ends in an all-too-human defeat. It is, so to speak, a mythical explanation of the deep problems of human morality, the reasons why good is so difficult to understand, and why it is so difficult to be good in a flawed world where evil in the form of selfishness and egoism creates veils that hinders true vision.

Tallis’s visualization of the translation-motif can thus be seen as an analogy to the double nature of moral language, in which there lies an ambiguity concerning sameness and difference. Thus, words such as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ can be seen to have meaning which transcends the particular languages in which they are uttered, and therefore reflect the sameness-aspect, or universal aspect of language. On the other hand, words cannot truly have meaning if they are not understood in context. This passage reflects both positions (remembering that Morgan’s reality is a symbol of language here). The first position is reflected by Morgan’s abstract yet real presence in Tallis’s consciousness. However, it also reflects Tallis’s realization that he has been clinging to the idea of Morgan, not the real person. As they are no longer bound to each other, she becomes foreign to him. Tallis’s realization that she is back in England without having been in touch is difficult for him because he is forced to acknowledge that he has lost her. In other words, at this stage of the story, the ideal relationship between the abstract idea of good and human language has truly disintegrated, and belongs in the past.

Tallis’s thoughts move from Morgan to Peter, and bring the focus back to what I have called “The Notting Hill Trinity”. Tallis sees Peter’s identity as “suspended”, meaning that it seems to exist in a vacuum, waiting to materialize. Tallis worries about it. Peter too sees this in himself, but, in opposition to Tallis, he rather likes it.

Although he tried, he communicated less and less with the boy. Tallis’s Peter was a very different person from Rupert’s Peter or even Hilda’s Peter. Tallis knew that. With his parents Peter acted a part. Tallis had thought this was something bad but was just now beginning to believe that it might be an element of salvation. The separation from

which so much had been hoped had conceivably stripped the boy of his last defence, the imperative need to keep up appearances. With Tallis Peter had no role and lived in a state of vulnerability and nakedness which was not too far from despair. (FHD:112)

It is important that in Tallis's relationship with Peter, the boy is not forced to "have a role". Tallis does not demand anything of Peter. But this is not because of Tallis's tolerance or goodness. It is because they do not interact with each other in a healthy relationship. The unreal quality in Tallis comes across as a sort of invisibility. It is never expected of Peter that he actually is to relate to Tallis. Because of this, he is not provided with an 'other' in Tallis with whom to keep up appearances. The keeping up of appearances has been a necessary defence, which has helped Peter to handle life. Playing a role keeps him away from emotional and psychological nakedness and ultimately, despair. Tallis is beginning to see that what he initially thought was bad, the "acting of a part", might be an "element of salvation". Through his observation of Peter, Tallis himself might be beginning his journey towards understanding the true nature of humanity, the place where goodness can be actualized. Salvation is found in intricate human bonds and the fellowship of people. He has not quite realised the significance of being a true 'other'. In the following text, Tallis seems to relate to "the unfortunates" of this world not as fellow human beings, but as objects that inspire compassion. This is not to say that Tallis does not treat them well, but that he never enters into personal relations with them.

Tallis had hoped that his protégé would have eyes for the unfortunates about him, who even if they could not always inspire compassion might appear interesting or at the very least picturesque to a boy nurtured in a world where money and good breeding precluded screams and blows. Here the causes of human misery, though they were infinitely complex, were shadowily visible and one could see the machine. Tallis had trusted that a glimpse of the machine might make Peter understand something, might make him see that revolt may be itself mechanical, and that human ills need thought and work which are disciples of the imagination. Even if Notting Hill had made Peter want Cambridge that would have been something, But now these calculations seemed merely stupid. Peter was shut up inside a world of private mythology and personal adventure and the picturesque ministered merely to that. Tallis knew of all the dangers. There was crime, there was heroin, there was despair and unbalance of the mind. (FHD:112-3)

Tallis's view of the world is expressed in this passage. He sees that the causes of human misery lie in a shadow land (c.f. the earlier reference to Jung) unseen by the middle class. The brute nature of human misery is like complex machinery. The nature of the machinery can be seen in situations where there is no consolation, such as the consolation that money, or good breeding would supply. Tallis thinks that if Peter is exposed to seeing "the machine", his

automatic response will be to help them. This reflects Tallis's own response to human ills. It is interesting to note that the goodness Tallis expects here is thus no more than an automatic response to a machine. It is not a compassionate person's response to the suffering of fellow humans. Neither Peter nor Tallis truly interact with reality. However, their lack of interaction has opposite reasons. Tallis focuses solely on "the other". He does not see himself as a necessary part of an ethical relation. He does not see himself as *being*, as a subject in the world. Peter's focus is solely on himself. After reading this passage, one becomes aware of the two fallacies they represent. One mistake is to see the world merely as a machine that can be operated without genuine personal involvement. The only involvement needed is a mechanical kind. The other is the danger of being caught in a world of "private mythology and personal adventure". Tallis ignores the role of the self, while Peter is drowning in the ego. Both stances are unsatisfactory, because they are, ultimately, non-relational.

Until now, Tallis has been alone. Then Peter knocks on Tallis's door. He comes in, and Tallis asks him about stolen goods which he has seen in Peter's room. They talk about stealing:

'Peter, you know you mustn't steal.'

'So you said before. But you were unable to tell me why.'

'To begin with it's wrong. And secondly you might get into serious trouble.'

'I'm indifferent to secondly and I don't understand to begin with. What does it mean to say stealing is wrong? I only take things from the big shops. No one is hurt. What's wrong with that?'

'It's wrong.'

'But what does that mean?'

'Oh hell,' said Tallis. (...) Right and wrong were as shadowy as bats.

'It's undignified.'

'Supposed I reject dignity as a value?'

'You should respect other people's property.'

'I'm prepared to respect other people. But under capitalism these things are not the property of the people, they're the making of big impersonal combines which are already making far too much money.'

'It involves concealment and lying.'

'Not even much concealment. I just pick the stuff up. And no lying. If someone asks me what I'm doing I shall say I'm stealing. And I'm not lying to you.' (FHD:115)

This is one of the very few directly moral conversations in the novel. It is particularly interesting because of the lack of forcefulness and authority in Tallis's argumentation. Peter has a reasonable answer to everything Tallis tries to articulate. Tallis fails to find reasons for why stealing is wrong, when he cannot use any other than rational and conventional arguments. The discussion between Peter and Tallis is a good example of the fact that the notions of right and wrong must be grounded in more than just formality and convention. When the deep cul-

tural values of European modernity change, the traditional arguments could seem to fail. They have lost their authority. Peter represents this shift in the values of society. Peter has an important symbolic role in the novel as the “spirit of change”. He represents the antitheses, the new idea that meets the old. His rebellion triggers the battle between the traditional and the innovative, and the search for new ways of understanding what is real, true and good. This is the moral philosophical landscape in which the action of the novel takes place. The metaphor of a battle here is mine, but corresponds to the title of the novel. There are winners, and those who are defeated.

Peter asks if he can sleep with Tallis. Textually, it is a seemingly innocent request, as if Tallis is a father and Peter his little child, not an adult student. This is something they often do, although it is not explicitly a sexual relationship.

They lay down together, bumping about, adjusting arms and knees within the cramped space and then were still, Peter with his face pressed into Tallis’ shoulder and Tallis looking over the light cool hair into the dimness of the room. Peter could feel the demons. Tallis could see them. They were not the dangerous kind. Holding the sleeping boy in his arms, with the rudiments of an erection, Tallis watched the demons play. (FHD:116)

The matter-of-fact acknowledgement of the presence of demons is an example of Murdoch’s magical realism. What are these demons? That they are “not dangerous” does not necessarily mean that they are positively good. One interpretation of them could be as a symbol of human sexuality. This motif was present earlier, with respect to Simon’s story: Eros as the energy which enables attention to the other although it can just as well enhance the ego (see for instance MGM:497). This corresponds well to the strong erotic/sexual element to this whole chapter. Many of Tallis’s thoughts are erotically charged. He is described as being “amorous” (FHD:113). Leonard makes several unpleasant remarks which indicate sexual abuse and incest. The sightings of the sister, the female twin, are somewhat erotic, but non-threateningly so. Tallis has “the rudiments of an erection”, and he and Peter “sleep together”. However, they do actually sleep. They do not have intercourse (although the sexual undertone is definitely present). The sexuality in this chapter is often distorted, and it is confusing to Tallis. His sexuality seems undirected, and this corresponds to the sense of unease and muddle Tallis feels at this stage of the story.

The demons also echo a reference Murdoch gives in *The Sovereignty of Good* to “Kafka’s struggle with the devil which ends up in bed” (SOG:68), which she mentions in the context of a discussion of sado-masochism. It is thus possible to relate the erotic aspect of this passage to

the fantasy that suffering and submission are ‘good’. The slave/master-relation can lead to a self-deception in which false humility is seen as a form of unselfing, and thus “produce plausible imitations of what is good” (SOG:68). This is crucial to understanding Tallis.¹⁸⁰ This chapter has shown that he seems to revel in suffering. Says Murdoch: “In reality the good self is very small indeed, and most of what appears good is not. The truly good is not a friendly tyrant to the bad; it is its deadly foe. Even suffering itself can play a demonic role here, and the ideas of guilt and punishment can be the most subtle tool of the ingenious self.” (SOG:68) This may be the clue to Tallis’s failure to stand up to Julius in the grand plot. Is Tallis no more than an imitation of good? It is important to remember that although he is an (ambiguous) symbolic Christ-figure in this novel, and partially cast as a personification of the abstract good, he is nevertheless also a human of flesh and blood, and therefore not perfect. His main imperfection is perhaps his problematic act as sufferer, as slave to the masters Julius, Morgan, Leonard and Peter. The question remains, though: can Tallis’s difficult search for self in this passage be explained by arguing that the “good self is small” and therefore hard to identify, or is his suffering search for self nothing but a self-indulgent fantasy? In other words: is Tallis’s lack of identity a symbol of the good as ‘unself’, or is it a consoling attention to self?¹⁸¹

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The ethical significance of the novel’s Chapter 6 primarily concerns the character Tallis. Elements of the present analysis are discussed further in the context of studying Tallis as character in Part V. Importantly, though, the present analysis focuses the *relational* construction of Tallis, as inherently *part of* (not only defined by his role in) a triadic unity. The implication of this constitutive relationality is twofold. First, that it is impossible to analyse Tallis (and thus the concept of ‘good’) adequately without seeing him/it as a dynamic entity. Secondly, the textual presence of religious language and imagery provide connotations that are of importance to understanding Tallis in terms of relationality. This applies, for instance, to the transfiguration and the distortion of the Trinitarian symbolism. The Jobian references are also of interest as such. I will return to these later with particular reference to the study of Julius and the intertextual relation between his story, and (the Leviathan-motif in) the book of Job. The narrative in Job also illuminates the “cosmic” relation between Julius and Tallis, ‘evil’ and ‘good’. A slightly different point of interest in this chapter, concerns the discussion between

¹⁸⁰ We shall also see that the slave/master-motif is relevant to understanding Morgan in relation to Julius.

¹⁸¹ This discussion will be central to the analysis of Tallis in Part V.

Peter and Tallis about stealing. It is interesting from a moral point of view: why do Tallis's words hold no authoritative potential for Peter? This theme (Peter's stealing) will resurface in another context in the novel. In both these situations it stimulates reflection on certain challenges to ethical theory.

d) A Midsummer Nightmare: Carnival (Chapter 11)

Chapter 11 provides an important key to the analysis of the novel as a whole. I have chosen to study it carefully, because it is, in many respects, "a novel in the novel", and not least: a miniature of the whole (i.e. a cameo of the novel). Through analysis, I can gain understanding of some deep structural motifs in the novel, and thus enable a more sophisticated analysis of the characters involved. The chapter is of particular interest with reference to Simon's story, and in continuation of this, Morgan's. A further reason for selecting the chapter for scrutiny is that it provides one of the most illuminating examples of dialogism of the whole novel. The flowing dialogue and its construction, is thus very interesting from a Bakhtinian point of view. The constant juxtaposition of voices, and the jumble of perspectives they represent, is all in all an important characteristic of the chapter. If the argument that the chapter is a cameo of the novel holds, the dialogism of the chapter is of particular importance and, therefore, has analytic interest.

It is a lovely summer's evening, a garden party at the Foster's house in Priory Grove. Many of the characters are there, although neither Julius, Tallis nor Leonard are. The narrator is occasionally present, and is external to the characters apart from at the end where there is a passage in which the narrative is focalized through Rupert. The dialogue is beautifully constructed, and flows freely between different participants. Towards the end of the chapter the conversations between pairs of the characters merge into a discussion on a larger scale, where most of the characters are involved. This is a rare occasion, as there are seldom more than three participants in a conversation throughout the whole novel. The chapter seems almost alive, teeming with voices. They rise out of the text, and the quarrelling, chatting, gossiping, discussing and joking reflects the swarming, polyphonic style of the novel. Neither the characters nor the story are tightly structured here. This chapter, as the total novel, is full of idiosyncrasies. There are trains of thought that go nowhere, symbols that make no sense, contra-

dictions in the portrayal of characters. In short, the chapter is like the novel: a maximalist, almost burlesque portrayal of the contingencies and patternlessness of human life.¹⁸²

The construction and style of this chapter is interesting and significant. As mentioned above, it is almost, but not quite, a cameo of the novel, a smaller version of the grand narrative. There are many structural similarities, and hints to the larger framework of the story. An important detail in this respect, is the reference to a mirror “You must see yourself!” (FHD:133). The sequence is a mirror image of the full story. Another is Axel’s temperamental outburst to Peter, who has offended him: “If you really want to get out of it you’d better emigrate or commit suicide” (FHD:137). Both these outcomes are pointers to the end of the story. Morgan, Hilda, Peter, Julius, Simon and Axel are all abroad when the novel ends (they all “get out of it”), and there is an uncertainty as to whether or not Rupert commits suicide. At the end of the chapter is a further reference to the pool. Rupert is gazing into it, looking at a glass that has been shattered and is lying at the bottom. The image of brokenness recurs often in the novel, and represents disintegration and failure. Thus, this points to the end of the novel. Rupert is very upset, but there is nevertheless an optimism in his thought which is typical of his lack of realism: “There is a path, he said to himself, because for love there is always one. But for him it was a mountain path with many twists and turns.” (FHD:139) This last comment by the narrator proves to be very true with respect to Rupert’s story.

The differences between this chapter and the novel in total are also significant, but nevertheless reflect the cameo status of the text. The chapter’s climax is when several of the characters try on a wreath of roses that Simon has made. The wreath fits Simon perfectly. Axel reflects that the original crown of thorns must have been made of roses, thus referring to the Biblical narrative. This scene is to a large extent a representation of the Passion. What is particularly interesting is that in the novel itself there is no Easter motif. There is no symbol of salvation or redemption in which the victory of good takes place. Thus, the narrative of the novel leads to the inevitable defeat of good by evil. That it is Simon who, in this chapter, represents salvation, is interesting with reference to a comment of his very early in the novel. When he and Axel discuss *The Flaying of Marsyas*, he says that there is no redeeming grace (other than sexual love). In the novel this is to a certain extent true. In this chapter, however, there are indications of an alternative plot, in which there *is* redemption and grace in the form of Art and Beauty (represented by Simon).

¹⁸² Chapter 11 is a glittering example of Bakhtin’s idea of the polyphonic novel, and, as we shall see, of carnivalism.

With respect to the presence of hope and the possibility of salvation in this chapter, the absence of the three (partially) non-human characters, namely the “demi-gods” Julius, Tallis and Leonard is also significant. The “humans” manage themselves well without the interfering presence of the supernatural element. This can well be an indication that the chapter reflects the particularly “human” experience of and perspective on the cosmic drama of the novel in full. It is therefore interesting that salvation, or redemption, has a significant place in this chapter, but not in the novel as a whole. It could also be argued that the text thus illustrates that the idea of salvation is a fantasy, a consolation to humanity, which is a hindrance to accepting the contingency and aimlessness of reality. This corresponds to Murdoch’s world view, and is reflected in the whole of the novel in the absence of the Easter motif.

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The story begins at the poolside. There are drinks and happiness, echoing the beginning of the novel. Most of the chapter consists of scattered conversations. These conversations often include pregnant comments on central themes of the novel. Morgan and Hilda discuss Tallis. Peter and Rupert quarrel about the value of a university education, and Rupert muses over his inability to be a loving parent and believes he has failed to truly understand what love is. Axel sulks, and is challenged by his lack of truthfulness concerning the fact that he is a homosexual. This is Axel’s sore point, as truth is of the utmost importance to him, and a theme most intimately connected to his narrative and survival. Simon runs around, slightly drunk and almost naked, making a wreath of roses for Morgan. For the sake of the present analysis I have lumped the fragments of dialogue into sections, although in the text they are thoroughly intermingled. At this point, I shall study the content of the conversations, and will not focus on the construction of the dialogue.

Rupert is concerned that Peter has dropped out of University. He tries to convince the young rebel why a good education is important, but fails. Rupert’s response to Peter’s rebellious attitude is interesting. It corresponds to the discussion Peter and Tallis had about stealing, but here, the arguments against stealing are different. Tallis and Rupert both fail in their attempt to convince Peter by the use of traditional and conventional arguments:

‘(...) As far as I’m concerned, the Cambridge business is over. ‘
‘But why? That’s what I can’t make out.’
‘All those values are false ones.’
‘What you need, my boy, is a little philosophical training. What do you mean by
“those values” and “false”?’
‘All those values you’re writing that big book about.’

‘Come, come. Be more precise. And let’s be more careful with our terminology, shall we? Propositions are true or false. Values are real or apparent. Now education is something which is genuinely valuable. Training your mind –‘

‘That’s all hocus-pocus. It’s a sort of conspiracy. People read a lot of old authors without understanding them or even liking them, they learn a lot of facts without feeling anything about them or connecting them with anything that’s present and real, and they call that training their minds.’

‘But that’s just what education is about, connecting the past with the present.’

‘Then it isn’t going on at Cambridge.’ (FHD:129)

Peter is, in a sense, like the boy in the story who points out that the emperor is not wearing any clothes. His observations are often very acute. He is, to a certain extent, a channel for Murdoch’s critique of traditional philosophy and morality. This does not mean, however, that Peter represents an authoritative voice which provides right answers, or that his opinions represent Murdoch’s voice in full. What is important here, however, is Peter’s point that the old authors are neither read with passion, emotion or understanding, nor are they connected to what is “present and real”. In this respect, it is true that he represents Murdoch’s voice. They identify the same problem, but they differ with respect to the consequences of such an insight. Peter disqualifies all tradition, all authority and all structure. Murdoch explores the connection between philosophy and the “present and real” through two different channels, theoretically in her philosophical texts, and in practice in her literary texts. Peter represents one important voice among many, but Murdoch orchestrates all the different voices into a complex structure by which the problems are examined. Here, she brings to life the problem of whether values are “real or apparent”. The following passage illustrates how literary texts raise questions and provide seeds of answers without the stringent rigidity of Rupert’s philosophical training. The dichotomy between the extremes of constructivism and realism is present in the juxtaposing of cynicism versus idealism and the profound difference between the generations and their moralities:

‘I’m afraid nowadays it’s you young people who are cynical and we middle-aged ones who are idealistic.’

‘We are not cynical. And you aren’t idealistic. You’re just a lot of self-centered habit-ridden hedonists.’

‘Well, maybe. But I’m inclined to think that it’s decent self-centered habit-ridden hedonists who keep this society going!’

‘Why should this society be kept going? The trouble is, you can’t see our morality as a morality.’

‘I confess I see it as a form of lunacy!’

‘Your morality is static. Ours is dynamic. What this age needs is a dynamic morality.’

‘Morality is static by definition. A dynamic morality is a contradiction in terms.’

‘Nothing is real unless it’s felt and present. Your world is all elsewhere.’ (FHD:131-2)

Peter and Rupert can be perceived as caricatured representations of what Murdoch sees as two philosophical fallacies. On one side stands Rupert, personifying the idealistic, rationalistic and decontextualised “thin” somewhat utilitarian moral philosophy which Murdoch opposes. Peter, on the other hand, represents the radical deconstructuralism and relativism which Murdoch is also at odds with. The underlying question in Peter and Rupert’s present discussion is: “what is real”? As this chapter is a concentrate of the novel, their disagreement highlights the question of reality as one of the fundamental problems which the novel explores. Their discussion echoes Murdoch’s treatments of the theme in her philosophy,¹⁸³ but neither of the characters provide any final answers. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the exploration of this theme throughout all aspects of the novel does in the end give some authority to Peter’s insistence that our age needs a “dynamic”, not a static morality. Exactly what this means remains, however, to be seen. At the end of the novel, Peter has been sentenced to therapy in California to sort himself out after having been caught on a stealing-spree, and Rupert is dead. Both their projects fail, more or less dishonourably.

In a different conversation, Hilda is curious as to what happened between Tallis and Morgan when their marriage disintegrated. Morgan gives some vague information, and Hilda responds: “You just don’t know how to tell a story!” (FHD:130). This is an interesting comment, and profoundly true. Morgan’s search for identity has to do with her search for a story of her life which makes sense to her. Her story as it is now, a jumble of fragmented experience, is not meaningful. Morgan knows this. She is deeply frustrated, and not capable of creating a coherent story of her life. The narrator’s narrative about her is not her own. It gives an image of Morgan on a desperate search for a simple formula for happiness: the “magical words” that will give her the meaning she is searching for. She asks Hilda what the purpose of life is, and Hilda answers “love”. In the novel, Morgan seems to adopt this uncritically, but conflates love and sex. Her quest for a purpose in life leads her into more or less sexual relationships with most of the men in the novel. It is significant that Hilda and Morgan have this conversation at the cameo garden party. It is a key to understanding Morgan throughout the novel: her search for selfhood, identity, and real love. Her story is about gradually developing an understanding of the meaning of true love, and the distinction between that and an egoistic, vain love of self.

¹⁸³ This is a central theme in Murdoch: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.

Simon is in a romantic and rather silly mood. He prances around and weaves a wreath of roses for Morgan. When he finishes this, he says: "I'm going to crown her Queen of Priory Grove". Everyone stops their conversation, and the whole group joins up with Simon.

'You must see yourself!' cried Simon. 'I'll get a mirror.'

'Here's one in my bag,' said Hilda.

Morgan surveyed herself. There were smiles, some of them a little forced.

'Simon, you really are an artist.'

'Now you're the Queen of the May, darling, except that it's July, and – '

'And I hardly qualify technically as a May Queen. Ooh, it's rather prickly, Simon.'

'Odd thought,' observed Axel to himself. 'The original crown of thorns must have been a crown of roses.'

'I think Peter ought to wear it,' said Morgan, 'that would be much more suitable. I'm not guessing about your sex-life, Peter! But you're obviously the youngest and least corrupted person present! Come here.' (FHD:133)

The mirror-symbol has already been used to argue that this chapter is a cameo of the novel. Another important aspect of its symbolism concerns Morgan and what she and her story represents, i.e. the process of the human soul on its quest for truth and love. Simon is, as mentioned above, the vehicle of salvation in this chapter. It is as if at a subconscious level he realises that she needs to see her true identity. As a symbol, the mirror indicates that the human soul can look at a representation of reality, through which the world becomes "more real". This is one of the many optical metaphors in this novel.

The crowning-sequence has several layers of meaning, and carries a multitude of intertextual relations. I have already commented on the Passion-references. A quite different association concerns a possible relation between Julius *King* and the May *Queen* (in July, a month with a strong likeness in name to our protagonist). Who is to be Queen to the King? In this chapter, the crown is ambiguous (the thorns versus the beauty of the artist's work). The crowning, too, has a sense of uneasiness. There are forced smiles, and only Simon actually feels comfortable. What is the significance of this? Is the crowning an inversion, a fantasy? What does it mean that the crown fits Simon? The scene contributes to a running ambivalence throughout the novel: what is appearance and what is reality? What is good, and what is evil?

Another reference is to Arthurian legend. The name Morgan echoes the character Morgan le Fay of the myth. She who is Queen of Avalon, is an enchantress with magical powers. She is sometimes presented as Arthur's sister, which corresponds to the earlier developed sisterhood-notations in Morgan Browne's story: the connections between Tallis's sister and Morgan, the Gemini star sign and her being Hilda's sister in the story. In the legend, Morgan le Fay heals Arthur when he is wounded. That Morgan Browne does not feel comfortable with

the crown in the present scene, suggests that she does not adequately fill the shoes of Morgan le Fay. For instance, she has no healing powers in this story. In fact, she causes many of the wounds.

Further, Morgan feels that she has no right to pose as the May Queen, who is supposed to be a young, innocent virgin. She hands it to Peter, who also feels uncomfortable with it. It doesn't fit him either. Peter wants Simon to wear it. Simon puts it on, and the crown fits perfectly. The "rightness" of a fit is folkloric tradition, like Cinderella's shoe that proves her to be the good heroine. Simon dances around, and says: "Oh, Hilda, I must see myself. I do look rather marvellous, don't I, Axel. Who am I? Puck? Ariel? Peaseblossom? Mustardseed? He began to dance lightly about on the hot flagstones." (FHD:134) Here is yet another literary reference. Simon refers here to the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He tries on the different names of the fairies to find which of them he is, which parallels his search for self. The title of this play of Shakespeare's, although hidden, turns out to be a comment on the novel, as it takes place in midsummer, much happens at night and there are several dream-sequences. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most carnivalistic plays, with burlesque characters and inversion as one of its central motifs. This chapter can also be seen as a deeply carnivalistic chapter, in which humour, cross-dressing and references to folklore and myth all are central.¹⁸⁴

The magic, carnivalistic atmosphere is broken when Peter comments rudely on Simon's femininity, and Axel becomes upset, saying they have to leave. Simon tells Peter to take a drink, something that is not water, telling him that it will do him good. Peter replies: "What sort of good? You people all drink in order to escape from reality. I happen to like reality. I'm staying with it, not taking off for the land of make-believe." (FHD:134). There are often comments on the characters' drinking habits. Axel remarks on the amounts that Simon drinks, and both Morgan and Rupert admit to being dependent. Hilda is tipsy every now and again. The alcohol illustrates the consolation the characters turn to in order to handle reality. Peter, Axel, Tallis and Julius drink very little. It is interesting that these all are very preoccupied with the truth, although their understandings of what "the truth" is are very different to one another's.

Axel and Peter have a bad quarrel, in which both tell the other unpleasant truths. They both break through the other's "veil of consolation". For Axel, coming to terms with his homosexuality is an important part of his progress towards insight. For the time being, however, the

¹⁸⁴ Carnival is, in Bakhtinian terms, one of the ultimate expressions of polyphony, in that such invertedness of the real is internal dialogism at a deep level. See Part IV, Chapter 10.2.

quarrel upsets the atmosphere, and Rupert in particular feels uncomfortable. This is an indication that Rupert cannot handle reality, but desperately seeks consolation. After Axel and Simon leave, Rupert and Morgan are the only ones left in the garden. Morgan tells Rupert to cheer up, and comments: “I think young people really don’t know how wretched and vulnerable every human heart really is.” (FHD:138). This is a wise and important observation. Ironically, though, it is not the young that fare the worst from this lack of knowledge: they themselves (Morgan and Rupert) will soon fall prey to the wretchedness and vulnerability of the human heart.

This important chapter ends with Rupert’s point of view, focalized by the narrator. He is very upset with all Peter has said during the party. Sensing that he is a complete failure, he can only partially identify what the problem is. He desperately wishes that he were a better person:

How could he possibly convey to his son the tenderness with which his heart was now so over-brimming that it stretched his bosom with a physical pain? Love, love was the key. (...) But Rupert knew too that his whole training, the whole of the society which kept him so stiffly upright and so patently and pre-eminently successful, had deprived him gradually of the direct language of love. When he needed gestures, strong impetuous movements to overturn barriers, he found himself paralysed and cold. There is a path, he said to himself, because for love there is always one. But for him it was a mountain path with many twists and turns. (FHD:138-9)

Rupert knows that he is not very wise. He realises that he has lost “the direct language of love”, and (rightly) sees this as a problem. This certainly affects his relationship with Peter, which is the context here. However, it is also relevant to the ensuing story, because it is the distortion of Rupert’s language of love that triggers his fall: his love-letters to Hilda are reconstructed (distorted) by Julius, and given to Morgan. Thus, it is true that his direct language of love is lost. This is his tragedy. Rupert tries and tries to be good. There seems, however, to be no grace for someone who just misunderstands.

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To conclude the analysis of Chapter 11, and point out the ethical significance, the most important aspect of it concerns issues of appearance versus reality. This duality of the text becomes clear both as a theme in the conversations, as well as with respect to the carnivalistic motif. What is real, what is not? What is salvation, what is not? What is true, what is not? What is good, what is not? Such themes are part of the deep quest of the novel: the search for understanding what morality, good and evil “are”, and the quest to understand what moral

progress is, and how it can be achieved. The chapter indicates the direction of what a true process of unselfing is about, and points towards the necessary, but difficult task of seeing what reality *is*.

e) Power, Passion, and Suffering (Chapters 12 & 13)

The two following chapters are in direct textual continuation of the one studied above. However, the scene changes quite significantly, and Chapters 12 and 13 together form a logical unity. Partially, this has to do with space, as most of the content of the chapters takes place in Julius's flat. Secondly, however, there is a strong thematic unity which has to do with the web of relationships between Julius, Morgan and Simon. Much of the twin-motif comes to the foreground in these chapters. Issues of power and submission recur in both, and are a central aspect of the "human" relations with "evil" Julius. This section is where the action of the story begins to accelerate. Until now, not much has actually happened. Here is a dramatic scene which is comic yet disturbing, and which has deep symbolic significance. Further, it is in these two chapters that Julius begins to tighten his grip, and the manipulation of the cast truly starts.

I use the word 'cast' deliberately, as much of what takes place has a staged quality to it. Stylistically, the text stands out of the novel almost as a play to an audience. It is also significant that in the following passages, a set of recurring theatrical symbols are introduced for the first time, namely those of the characters as actors in plays in which they cast each other in their own webs of drama. In this section, there is much conversation as usual, but the narrator has a stronger presence than otherwise. This has to do with the action being visually dramatic. The theatrical or filmic style is evident in the careful use of detail concerning light, atmosphere, colours, clothes and facial expressions. The conversations are enigmatic. The overall effect is one of suspense, surprise and uncertainty. What really happens here, and why? Morgan's words and actions often make little sense. What Julius is up to, is very unclear. This uncertainty is reflected in Simon's reaction, as he finds the whole situation extremely uncomfortable.

The physical action is as follows: in the first of the two chapters, Morgan goes on an unannounced visit to Julius at his flat. They have an important conversation in which she declares her love, and he his indifference to her. This climaxes in a situation in which Morgan undresses for him, and begs him to cut up her clothes. Julius does this, and locks her naked into the flat, with no access to clothes. He leaves her there. After a while, she starts to panic and is

forced into reflecting on her life. In Chapter 13, Simon is on his way through the streets of London to Julius's flat with the intention of planning a secret surprise for Axel's birthday. Simon arrives, and finds Morgan alone, naked and crying. They talk, and he lends her his clothes so that she can get home to get her own. They fit her perfectly. She leaves, Simon falls asleep and dreams. Julius arrives back home, and Morgan returns. Finally, Simon and Morgan leave together.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 is important for four main reasons: first, it is central to the development of the plot in that the imbalance of power between Morgan and Julius, and the intensity of her "love" for him, is an essential basis for what will happen in the story. Secondly, the chapter is significant because of the actual content of their conversation. They talk about central themes like love, passion, suffering and power. Their opinions and emotions are interesting from a philosophical point of view and will in part be discussed as such. Thirdly, it provides examples of the juxtaposition of appearance and reality, which is one of the deep-running themes of the novel. Finally, and probably most crucial: this is one of the central chapters with respect to Morgan. It is one of the lowest points of her story. She is strongly focalized here, and the reader gains access to much of the individuality of her character.

Julius's flat is smart, and exclusively decorated. This is in stark contrast to Tallis's house. Where Julius's flat is excessively neat and expensive, Tallis's house is messy, cheap, dirty and smelly. This motif was commented on earlier, in the context of Tallis and Leonard in the Notting Hill kitchen. As I have pointed out: dirt and scruffiness can signify goodness, and this has to do with Murdoch's view of vanity. Vanity is a celebration of the ego, and thus a great hindrance to unselfing. To be unaware of the appearance of oneself or one's living conditions is thus a symbol of attention to what is other than oneself. Therefore, such unawareness of appearance can be a symbol of good. This is an interesting contrast to more traditional (non-Murdochian) images of good, in which it often is connected to that which is pure, white and clean.

Julius is not pleased at seeing Morgan. The psychological distance, and hierarchical relation between them is enhanced by the ironic (but not funny) use of titles: Mrs. Browne and Professor King (FHD:140). In the previous chapter, Morgan did not feel she could pass as the (May) Queen. Her sceptical intuition then could indicate that her present attempt to win back the love of Julius is contrary to what is right for her, although she does not recognize the signs.

Many aspects of the novel up until now have pointed towards the mismatch of Julius and Morgan. Yet, Morgan is deeply attracted to him, and will not give him up. This scene is eerie and uncomfortable. Morgan grovels and begs Julius to love her, or at least, to let her love him. Julius is harsh and dismissive towards her. She feels muddled, but is very conscious of her attraction to Julius, although she does not quite understand it. The following passage is an example of her passion. It is rather disturbing and sinister in its intensity:

‘I love you, Julius. (...) Oh, Julius, please listen to me. Since I left you I’ve been lost and crazy. But I haven’t stopped thinking about you for a single second. I’ve breathed you and eaten you and drunk you and wept you. Perhaps I needed to leave you for a while just to find out how much you meant to me. You drove me away, you know you did. You were trying to test me, and I seemed to fail. But, Julius, I haven’t really failed. Oh if you only knew how I’ve suffered, how I’ve cried and cried in awful hotel bedrooms and talked to you endlessly in my heart. Your absence has clung to my side like an animal devouring my entrails. I’ve wanted you minute after minute halfway across the world. And I’ve come to realise it now, that you’re the most important thing that has ever happened to me, you’re the *only* important thing that has ever happened to me, and if I’m to live with the truth I must live with this for the rest of my days even if it burns me, even if it kills me!’ (FHD:141-2)

The whole chapter contains much more of her speech in a similar style to the above. Passages like this, compared to Morgan’s voice in other places in the novel, raise the question of which of her voices are trustworthy. What is the reality behind her words? Her self-knowledge and self-presentation are dependent on her interlocutor. Is the love she here declares to Julius true, or was she closer to herself for instance when she told Hilda how confused she was about her feelings for Julius (FHD:58)? Is it really Julius she desires, or is it her vanity that cannot take the fact that he has left her? Morgan’s emotions are often contradictory throughout the novel, not least with respect to herself.

The issues at stake also point to an important aspect of what it means to be human. Morgan, as the symbol of the human soul, is deeply and disturbingly chaotic. She represents the experience of not seeing reality clearly, of wearing veil upon veil which obscure the truth of selfhood. The paradoxical nature of passages concerning Morgan’s emotional life provides a very good description of this very human experience of the elusiveness of emotion. Her confusion is recognizable. The ambiguity of her voice throughout the novel also highlights the insight that inner life is not a stable entity. It is fundamentally affected by interaction between self and other people. A further serious possibility is that her different voices in different relationships do not represent confusion and muddle and lack of understanding of the reality behind her words, but reflect the fact that human reality *is* precisely this muddle. Morgan’s

problem might thus be that she searches for her real self, without understanding that she already *is* her real self. The direction of her search is inwards to a self that she will never find, instead of accepting her confusion, standing in its midst, and focusing her attention on what is other than herself. In other words, Morgan's task is the difficult psychological challenge of understanding that it is through losing oneself that one gains true selfhood, and that this can only be achieved by focusing one's attention on the other, not self.

Julius's responses to Morgan's passionate ranting are short and curt. Their conversation involves a complex game of sex, submission and suffering. At one point in this chapter, Morgan says: "Julius, I could be your slave" to which he replies: 'I don't want a slave' (FHD:142). This can be related to Murdoch's discussion of what she refers to as a sado-masochistic relationship (SOG:68). Her point is that both parties in such a relationship are consoled by self-indulgent fantasies. Most human love is, according to Murdoch, at some level sado-masochistic, in that love often involves both power and suffering. Therefore, such relationships are not true relationships, because the imbalance of power makes true reciprocity impossible. About the consoling power of suffering in the face of (violent) power, Murdoch writes in *The Sovereignty of Good*: "Few ideas invented by humanity have more power to console than the idea of suffering. To buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of good: what could be more satisfying, or as a romantic might say, more thrilling?" (SOG:82) Death has no meaning, and in the face of death (real or symbolic), one must accept this meaninglessness. This corresponds to the presence of a salvation-motif in the cameo-carnival of Chapter 11. From a human point of view, consolation is necessary, and suffering is one aspect of such consolation. Murdoch's point is that it is a fantasy that suffering in itself is good and purifying, and counters evil. Morgan's (thrilling) image of Julius' *absence* as a monstrous being "devouring her entrails" and causing her to suffer, is in this context a powerful symbol.¹⁸⁵ The negative formulation indicates his unreality as the true object of her desire. The Julius over whom she passionately despairs is, in fact, a figment of her imagination. Both his reality in her life and the suffering she believes him to cause her, are grandiose fantasies which become her consolation. Morgan's suffering is neither a true quest for a sense of self, nor does it provide her with an understanding of the other as "real" in relation to herself.

Julius continues to insist that there is nothing between him and Morgan. He has no interest in her. On the one hand, he is being honest, and represents a sense of reality in contrast to Mor-

¹⁸⁵ The comment suggests an understanding of evil as absence, nothingness or chaos, a motif we shall return to in the analysis of Julius in Part V, Chapter 14.

gan. On the other hand, he does not show any sign of empathy, fondness or even “negative” emotions such as hatred. Morgan tells him that she will suffer for him if he wants her to. He is emotionally indifferent to her, pointing out that there is “no mutual connection”, and he continues to act unkindly. This exaggerates the distorted power-relation between them. He says:

Suffering is amusing and may even do work in a situation where two people are connected with each other. Where there is no mutual connection it is undignified, grotesque and ugly. It is seen to be something totally pointless and unnecessary, like all the rest of the suffering human beings do every day. There is now no relationship between us and I find your contortions merely embarrassing. (FHD:143)

This passage provides a clue to understanding the test which Julius later sets for the unknowing victims of his wager with Morgan. His goal could seem to be to open the eyes of the other characters to their messy humanity, in order to achieve an unemotional and deterministic approach to suffering and morality. Murdoch describes such an ideal as a representative of “Luciferian philosophy of the adventures of the will.” (SOG:48). A later reference to “the Kantian man-god” Lucifer (SOG:80) serves to strengthen Julius’s demonic role and supernatural presence in the novel. In this image, she lumps together certain aspects of the type of Kantian, linguistic, behaviouristic and existentialistic perspectives that she opposes. Julius does to a certain extent fill the shoes of this “man-god”. He is portrayed as an independent, lonely, rational, powerful individual. This is very significant in an interpretation of the character Julius. Although he has conversations with people, he never seems to be truly involved with them, as this chapter with him and Morgan shows. He is “above” relationships. Precisely because Julius is emotionally detached from all other people, the grotesqueness of suffering can be amusing to him. It is, however, important to remember that until the final pages, there is no narrated access to his inner life, only to his words and action. This raises the question of whether the reader’s judgement of him is fair.

Julius provides an interesting observation on Morgan’s behaviour, in which he sees her as the dramatic director of her own life – a play in which he wants no part:

I appreciate that you want some sort of drama, and you desire me to enact a part. You feel guilty and mixed up and you want to go through some sort of ritual of purification or even punishment. But I cannot assist you, my dear Mrs. Browne. I am no actor. I always told you the truth. (FHD:145)

Interestingly, Julius draws a connection between drama and ritualistic purification, which of course corresponds to the idea of catharsis in the Greek tragedies and of much subsequent literature. Drama, or narrative literature, can thus be seen as a form through which life is

given a meaning which it does not necessarily have. This echoes Plato's negative attitude to art, a theme which Murdoch treats with ambivalence.¹⁸⁶ Morgan's story in the novel is, as Julius points out, a quest for purification in a situation in which she feels she has made a mess of her life. Her story remains, to the very end, unresolved in this sense. The more she seeks her purification/punishment, her enacting of the sufferer leads her in the opposite direction. The truth which Julius refers to is that Morgan is too much entwined in her ego to ease her guilt. He sees this, and uses it for what seems to be nothing but his own amusement. Julius says he is no actor. This is true in the sense that his power over the others is such that he seems to be apart from the interactive play which the others are caught in, and in which they play roles given to them by themselves and others. Julius's stark truthfulness is disturbing, and has demonic overtones. He is not an actor or a puppet. He is the grand puppet-master who manipulates the others, and in this chapter Morgan (and Simon) experience this.

A long passage in the novel-text is narrated with internal focalization of Morgan. She is naked and vulnerable, alone in Julius's flat. The following extract is crucial in understanding what Julius represents to her, and includes some central symbols.

Morgan had seen something in those later days with Julius which had seemed like a deep truth. It had been like a mystical vision into the heart of reality, as if one were to be promised the secret of the universe and then, with all the sense of significance and finality fully preserved, to be shown a few mouldering chicken bones lying in a dark corner covered with dust and filth. (FHD:149)

The passage is ambivalent. Julius's role in this realization is difficult to grasp. Does her relationship with him reveal reality to Morgan, or does he obscure it? Does she at a deep level sense that her love for Julius is exposed as a sham? Or is the profound truth of reality she perceives "like a mystical vision" that of the necessary acceptance of death and mortality, something which Julius helps her to see? The chicken bones in the corner signify death and finitude. The dust and filth echo Tallis's house. With reference to analysis of some earlier passages, this represents the harshness of true reality, which must be accepted. Whatever Julius's role is, for Morgan this truthful vision of reality is too hard for her to bear. It is the reason she seeks the passionate throes of a love which is an illusion. The elevated love she dreams of and seeks is not love of the other, but love of the ego, which she needs to console and protect: "Morgan had loved Julius with her whole nature and in the first shock of love she had found it impossible not to believe that Julius loved her. Such is the natural illusion of a lover."

¹⁸⁶ See for instance, Murdoch, Iris: "The Fire and the Sun. Why Plato Banished the Artists" in: Murdoch: *Existentialists and Mystics*, (p.386-463).

(FHD:149) There is a strong Faustian motif in Morgan's story. She is willing to sell her dignity, her soul and identity, to grasp some of the truth that she thinks that Julius (Satan) can provide. The love for which she is willing to sell herself into submission and slavery, is a fantasy. It blurs her vision. Ironically, this is exactly the same thing that will happen in her forthcoming relationship with Rupert. Morgan's story in this novel is about her seeking the love she thought she saw, constantly chasing the mirage.

Her thoughts move from one bond to another, and she reflects over her relationship with Hilda. Their mother had died young, and their father was never close to the sisters. Like Tallis's family, Hilda and Morgan's was dysfunctional, somewhat disintegrated. Morgan is very conscious of what Hilda thinks about her and her life. She seeks her validation through Hilda's acceptance of her. It is thus not only the love of men that Morgan seeks:

Morgan's relationship with Hilda was probably the only thing in her life that was so deeply buried that it had never been subjected to any strain or touched by any critical doubt. (...) It was known between them that Hilda had a kind of human strength and authority to which Morgan did not aspire. It was Hilda who was the deeply rooted tree. Morgan had indeed drawn a picture of this tree, the Hilda-tree, when she was six years old and had drawn a little bird in the branches which she announced to be herself. (FHD:151)

Hilda has always been the safe, rooted haven for Morgan. Because of this deeply buried relationship between the sisters, it had been difficult for Morgan that Hilda had disliked her marriage to Tallis. Her relationship with Julius also disturbs their closeness. Later in the story yet another man, namely Rupert, comes between Morgan and Hilda. The powers of erotic attraction create a rift in her experience of being safe with Hilda: "The cosmic explosion of falling in love with Julius interrupted Morgan's converse with Hilda as it interrupted everything else in her life." (FHD:151) Morgan, who once saw herself as a little bird, flies from one man to another trying to find love, her home, and herself. She has throughout her adult life been torn between loyalties to her sister, and, to use her own bird-symbol, her instinct to "fly away". This pull between important people in Morgan's life, is symbolic of the human condition, in which we are intricately bound up in different relationships which demand different things of us. Throughout the novel, the character Morgan's confusion and her enactment of what almost seems to be different personas, is a very profound illustration of the dilemmas we as humans find ourselves having to cope with in relation to others.

She had attempted to go on quietly with Hilda's view of the situation. But all the while she had been secretly vibrating with a dark excitement which she had known to be unhealthy and possibly evil. She surrendered herself at last to destiny, that wicked and

consoling force, the destiny which made it certain that her path would cross again with that of Julius. When he had come, in order to find her, there could be no doubt at all about that, to Priory Grove, she had felt herself indeed to be in the hands of gods. (FHD:153)

Here, Morgan has attempted to adopt Hilda's point of view. This is important, as it indicates that Morgan has not much of a sense of self, or control over her own willpower. Eros in a Platonic/Murdochian sense is energy which, as I have mentioned, is neutral per se, but has the potential of directing attention to the individual other. However, as Morgan has little sense of her true self, she cannot focus on the other from the self's vantage point. Thus, Eros becomes a destructive and consoling force, because she constantly tries to see herself, not the other. Morgan's lack of will power and sense of self is strongly present in this text. She feels led by destiny, by the gods. She is not free, and has no responsibility other than to let the gods do their work.

She reflects on her relationship with Tallis. At one level Tallis's love for Morgan is perfect love, as he does not love her to boost his ego but for her own sake. However, Tallis's selflessness is not unproblematic. He is an ambiguous character. Here, where Morgan thinks through many aspects of her life, she feels a need to get Tallis out of her mind, to "put him away" mentally. Her priorities concerning love are false. Therefore, it might be possible to conclude that she is likely to reject what is good for her.

With Tallis she had determined to be cool. There was, she felt, no action now of gentleness and love which could genuinely profit her, or even him. All kindness must mislead. What she feared most of all was a renewal of that fatal gushing tenderness, that pitiful "animal" feeling which she had described to Hilda, and which had made it seem to her long ago that Tallis was the one man whom it was impossible to leave, the being whom it would be her happiness to render happy. How much joy this happiness, his amazed humble sense of luck had given her once. But that way pity lay and dangerous and tender tears. Morgan had realised, as soon as she was inside the door, how hard it was going to be not to weaken and to make him, even for a moment, happy once again. She had at the same time realised what it was that could save her: contempt. That which was at the opposite extreme from love: the cynicism of a deliberate contemptuous diminution of another person. As she profited by it she thought, I am seeing him as Julius sees him. (FHD:154)

Again, Morgan adopts someone else's vision. She finds that in order to forget Tallis, she must "harden her heart". Kindness, compassion, tenderness cannot belong in this cynical approach. This corresponds with Murdoch's insistence that the inner, mental life is a relevant aspect of moral analysis of action. The words we use and concepts we think with are relevant to how we see a situation, something she illustrates beautifully in her famous story about the Mother-

and Daughter-in-law (M and D) in *The Sovereignty of Good* (SOG:17). True love, seeing the other in the light of the good, has to do with humility. Morgan cannot afford such tenderness and pity, because she feels diminished by it, not realising that it is through accepting this that she would be able to find happiness.

Chapter 13

This chapter continues to thematize many of the issues that were raised in Chapter 12. While Morgan was the main character in the previous chapter, Simon dominates the present chapter. However, as has been pointed out, the distinctions between the two are blurred, and it is particularly in this chapter that come to understand this unity, or tight relation, between Morgan and Simon as a double representative of the human soul.

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Simon is out walking on a Friday evening. The summer heat makes London seem “unreal” (FHD:156). It is hot, and he is uncomfortable with the heat. As usual, he worries about his relationship with Axel. Axel is worried about and embarrassed by his own behaviour towards Peter at the garden party, and Simon has been observing this. He is aware of a strange change in Axel’s emotions: “What puzzled Simon was that the distress occasioned by Peter seemed now somehow to be attaching itself to Julius, as if Julius were its real source.” (FHD:159) Julius seems to Simon to be the source of distress, a “place” from which evil seeps. His emotions reflect a mysterious “magical” quality. Yet again, Julius seems like a magician. There is something gothic and sinister in the visual imagery. The narrator gives a filmic impression of the atmosphere of Bond Street, where Simon is walking. It also has a prophetic overtone: “London felt idle and languid and wicked. I feel as if something were going to happen, he thought, and something not at all nice.” (FHD:159) He starts worrying that something might happen to Axel. Then he sees some nice clothes in a shop window, and instantly stops, and imagines himself wearing them. Simon is very conscious of, and easily distracted by beauty. This perhaps indicates Simon’s shallowness, but the impression which is conveyed is rather that he senses and notices what is other, beautiful and good: that which transcends the ugliness of reality.

Axel is at the opera while Simon is on his way to Julius. The opera is Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, the name of suggests faithfulness, and serves as a hint to a primary characteristic of Simon and Axel’s relationship. The use of opera in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is yet another example of intertextuality which needs to be mentioned in order to show the broad scope of such refer-

ences. Conradi discusses this, and writes: “Northrop Frye has pointed out that the true descendant of Shakespearian romantic comedy, with its twins, disguises and concealments, is Romantic opera.”¹⁸⁷ Such motifs have already been in action, and the many references to opera (direct or indirect) enhance the impression that these aspects are relevant to an interpretation of the novel.

Simon is expecting to plan a surprise for Axel with Julius. He is, however, worried about sharing a secret with Julius, and hiding things from Axel. Again, the dynamic of secrets and lies within their relationship comes to the foreground. He suddenly realises that he finds Julius physically attractive, but he thinks: “I have never really been able to distinguish between fear and sexual desire.” (FHD:160) This is interesting, as his clarity of thought far exceeds Morgan’s. He senses the complexity of the attraction Julius holds for the other characters. He senses the attraction of evil, as well as being aware of the power Julius has. When he arrives at Julius’s house, Julius is not at home. But to his surprise and distress, Morgan is there. She is happy to see him. He is shocked to find her almost naked. In the living room, Morgan has turned the place upside down in order to find something to keep her warm and covered. She has broken an expensive T’ang Chinese horse, and the pieces are lying about. This image is important. In earlier passages of the novel, Simon and Hilda both envision themselves as “picking up the pieces” after Morgan. The breaking of the horse can, therefore, indicate that Morgan’s ordeal has begun. The pieces are a symbol of the disintegration and fragmentation of Morgan’s story.

Morgan and Simon talk for a while. Morgan tries to explain what has happened. Simon is confused and insecure. He does not enjoy seeing Morgan naked, as he finds her different from how she usually presents herself. This indicates Morgan’s vulnerability in this scene, and also echoes the sub-theme of the difference between appearance and reality. A description that is often used with reference to Morgan, is that she is “bird-like”. Here, Simon sees her as a bird. She looks old and harsh and is almost blind without her glasses. Clarity of vision is a recurring motif in Murdoch’s work, and the broken spectacles are therefore an important symbol. Morgan’s sight-impediment is a clear indication that she is far from seeing true reality.

Morgan manages to persuade Simon to let her have his clothes, and wait for her while she goes home in order to get her own. She dresses up in Simon’s clothes. She even puts on his tie. His clothes fit perfectly. She has often thought that they resemble each other (FHD:165).

¹⁸⁷ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.208-209. The passage is a discussion of the impact of opera on the plot, but I shall not follow this path any further.

This represents one of several instances in which Morgan is interchangeable with other people in the novel. This is particularly so in the conflation of her with Tallis's twin sister in certain passages, as well as the more common interchangeability with Simon. This clothes scene is important in this respect. Both of them are the object of Julius's flirtatious attention. At a certain level, Simon and Morgan are the "same", but they are nevertheless different from each other. Together, they represent humanity in the cosmic sub-drama of the novel. The dialectic of "sameness and difference" inherent in their representation of humanity, will be an aspect of the forthcoming discussions on moral life and authority.

After Morgan leaves, Simon is left alone in Julius's flat. There are several references to the "eerie twilight", and the fact that he cannot turn on any light, because the curtains are torn down and he would be seen from the outside. A particular characteristic of Simon's story is that he is being forced to live in the midst of his untruthfulness. Here, he is caught in a secretive action, and cannot let the truth out (i.e. turn on a light, and be seen from the outside). The atmosphere in the room is strange. It is silent, it becomes dark, and there are deep shadows everywhere:

The walls seemed to be changing into huge hanging shadows charged with positive obscurity. They became menacing and deep, tall mahogany bookcases that reached to the ceiling, immense carved wardrobes with open doors and soft furry interiors of dark suspended clothes. Places where a child might get lost. A very long time seemed to be passing. (FHD:166-7)

This passage, which involves an mental metamorphosis of the room, indicates that the following is psychologically interesting. It can be seen as Freudian (and Jungian) imagery: the "shadow land" is that of the unconscious, the open doors of the wardrobes with the "soft, furry interiors" of clothes is a vaginal symbol. This cliché-like Freudian symbolism becomes parodic when Simon then falls asleep on the couch (!) in the uncomfortable room. The description of the room turns into a dream, in which the images from above are intensified. I quote the dream at length:

Simon was moving through a dark twilit garden underneath huge plane trees through whose leaves a luminous but darkening sky could intermittently be seen. There was different light under the trees, strange light, dark and yet lurid. He was following his mother who was walking some ten paces ahead of him and guiding him. He felt terrible choking anxiety and had difficulty in walking. His mother moved onward like a dog, turning every now and then to look at him, and when she turned the luminosity under the trees was reflected in the steel rimmed spectacles which she was wearing, and her eyes gleamed cold like those of a nocturnal animal caught in a ray of light. Simon knew that she was going to show him something appalling. The garden seemed to go on and on and the plane trees grew thicker and darker overhead. At last his mother stopped

and pointed at something on the ground. In the illuminated darkness Simon saw a long mound of ashes, like the ashes of a bonfire. There were sticks and fragments of branches and withering flowers lying all about as if they had been part of the bonfire but had not been consumed. He felt an urge to touch the ashes and leaned down. Then he saw, only a few inches from his hand, a piece of brown tweed. He saw the turn-ups of the trouser, and then a protruding leg with a dark sock and shoe. He withdrew his hand with horror, thinking instantly, this is my father's grave. My mother has led me to my father's grave. Yet that cannot be. My father was cremated. Would he be lying like this in his clothes underneath a pile of ashes? Is that what happens to people when they are cremated? He began to stir the ashes with his foot. The material of the brown suit, filthy with ash, began to emerge from the mound. Simon fell on his knees and dug. He dug his way up the recumbent body, clawing the cold sticky ash frantically away with his hand. He dreaded to uncover the face which his digging fingers were now touching. He brushed the ash aside. The dead face was that of Rupert. Suddenly there was a great deal of light. (FHD:167-8)

In the dream, the darkness is "illuminated". This is an odd notion, but corresponds to the use of light-imagery in the novel. Sunlight, the light from a fire, electrical light and this "dream-light" are all aspects of the same, and represent degrees of seeing reality truthfully. The uncomfortable atmosphere of the dream is morbid. Some of the images are reminiscent of Morgan's vision of the chicken-bones above, which were read as a symbol of death. The death-imagery is significant. In one sense, it signifies death of the self-centred ego. This is important in the Murdochian understanding of human (moral) development. It is also relevant here, because of the prophetic nature of the passage. Rupert does die at the end of the novel. When Simon faces death in his dream, there is much light. This might signify a happy ending for Simon's story. But why is it positive for Simon that Rupert dies?

This passage provides a central clue to what Simon's narrative is about. Simon becomes an adult through this novel, and develops in moral maturity from the beginning to the end of the novel. His story is, to a certain extent, that of a bildungsroman: the young person leaves home, lives through an ordeal and finally returns home with a deeper maturity having reached adulthood through the symbolic acceptance of death.¹⁸⁸ He loses the child-like innocence, and finds his manhood-identity by losing his identity as the lost son. Rupert and Axel are parallel figures in many ways, and can both represent a father figure to Simon. Axel is very patronizing in relation to Simon. Simon's development into an adult by the release of the father-figure

¹⁸⁸ In my master thesis (Stenseng: "Med kjærlighetens blikk"), I analysed Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice* as an exploration of the bildungsroman-motif, and also discussed it as an example of the comedy form as articulated by Northrop Frye, in Frye, Northrop: *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature*. San Diego/New York/London 1982. Much of the analysis of the main characters Edward Baltram and Stuart Cuno is echoed in the present analysis of Morgan/Simon in their quest for moral maturity.

might be the reason why Simon and Axel's relationship not only survives, but matures during the course of the novel. The light at the end of the dream thus signifies that Rupert's death is the final step in Simon's release from innocence and childhood to moral maturity.

Simon wakes up from the terror of the dream. Julius has come home, and switched on the light. He is surprised: "I leave a naked girl and I return to find a naked boy." (FHD:169) This intensifies the notion that an important aspect of Simon's story is the transition from boy to man. Here, he is still a boy. Julius's comment also evokes the interchangeability of Morgan and Simon. Julius does not understand why Simon is there. He tries to explain. It turns out that Julius had forgotten that he had invited Simon, and when Simon asks him why he had been invited in the first place, Julius answers: "Oh, I forget. I expect I just wanted to see if you would." (FHD:169) This indicates that Julius is purely playing a game with the others. Morgan's involvement with Rupert will also turn out to be a result of Julius "just wanting to see" if they would follow his script. It reveals his cynicism. However, for once Julius also comes across as a compassionate person. He realises that Simon is not happy, and says: "Don't fret, child. *All manner of thing shall be well.*" (FHD:170, my italics). Here, Julius quotes Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*. In her vision, this is what God as Trinity tells all humanity. This clearly illustrates the ambivalence of Julius's character.¹⁸⁹

The reference to Julian of Norwich's text is helpful in understanding Simon's story. Simon and Axel are to be the survivors of the story, because their attention is, at least towards the end of the story, focused upon the other. They manage to see each other with honesty and clarity of vision. Thus, they see themselves truthfully, and therefore, "all manner of things shall be well". They represent the mystical idea that the approach to good is that of loving virtue, not a rejection or hatred of "low" humanity.

Morgan arrives back at Julius's flat having collected her own clothes. Morgan says: "Oh, Julius (...) you really are a *god!*" (FHD:170). She is fascinated by him. Simon gets ready to leave, and dresses. Julius tells him that Morgan will be going with him. Hers is a powerless acceptance of what Julius tells her to do. All her personal will has disintegrated: "All right, Julius. Still God." (FHD:171). There is a change from lower case to capital letter in god/God here. This could imply that Julius's role as a mysterious man-god is ambiguous. He is "a god" in her subjective, self-enhancing vain sexual fantasy, but he also represents a fantasy that

¹⁸⁹ The allusions to Julian of Norwich are discussed in greater detail in the analysis of Julius in Part V, Chapter 14.

transcends her narrative. He is an “objective” consoling fantasy, in the sense that he has a religious “presence”, which is problematic in a Murdochian universe.

Julius and Morgan start laughing, while Simon watches them “morosely”. He is uneasy. From now on, he is caught in a powerless watching mode which perseveres almost to the end of the story. (He will then break out of passivity, and enter the action by trying to salvage the ruins, rather than watch his life fall down around him.) For a long time Simon will remain enslaved by Julius’s powerful will. His own will is, for the time being, suspended. However, he will (partially) manage to break away from Julius. Julius advises Simon not to tell Axel what has happened, thus manipulating him into actions with which he feels uncomfortable. Simon agrees, but is unhappy. “He feels the fear again, a feeling as of taking a first step in under a dark canopy.” (FHD:171) Simon’s intuition that he has reason to fear is correct, although he does not understand what is happening. Julius challenges his worry that Axel will find out, saying: “Careless talk costs loves, my Simon. (...) A necessary ingredient in a happy marriage is the ability to tell soothing lies to your partner.” (FHD:172) Simon senses that this is wrong, but is seduced into believing Julius. He sees no other honest option than to lie to Axel.

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In this reading of Chapters 12 and 13, I have outlined a background to the later discussions of the quest for “true vision” and true selfhood in the analysis of the character of Morgan. Simon and Morgan represent different aspects of such a quest, but the parallels between them are significant. One story will turn out to be dominated by disintegration, the other is a story of developing moral maturity. The motif of sameness and difference offers an interesting point on human moral life, as the Morgan/Simon-constellation gives insight into a duality of humanity: we are simultaneously ‘same’ and interchangeable (thereby with a need for universal morals) yet inherently different and unique (an argument for a particularistic approach to morality). This is an critical ethical point. Otherwise, the chapter has been important with respect to identifying and commenting on some key relationships in the novel. As both Julius and Morgan are to be studied in detail later, and Simon has been identified as partially inherent in this constellation, it has been necessary to study the dynamics of these characters in action.

f) Julius and Morgan in the Tate Gallery (Chapter 19)

The twist of the plot happens in this chapter, which is why it has been selected for a close reading. Julius tells Morgan about his plan to destroy relationships, in order to prove how fragile and illusive human relations are. I will discuss a few aspects of the plot, as well as

study references to art, and some ethical implications of these. Finally, the relationship between Julius and Morgan, which takes centre stage in this chapter, is of importance to the forthcoming character analysis of them both.

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Morgan and Julius meet by accident at an exhibition of modern sculpture in the Tate Gallery. Julius does not approve of the art: “This stuff is pure and absolute junk. And look at all those asses staring at it with reverence! The human race is incurably stupid.” (FHD:228)¹⁹⁰ Julius typically distances himself verbally from the human race. The effect is an impression that he represents an external ‘other’ to humanity. Until now, Julius’s power has been felt by Morgan and Simon. In this chapter, his power seems to expand to a level of higher potency. Morgan and Julius decide to leave the modern sculptures in order to see what they call “real art”. Morgan suggests the Turners. The rest of the scene takes place in the Turner gallery. There are no other visitors there, which is typical of the novel. The constant isolation of the characters from the rest of the world enhances the symbolic effect of the situation they are in, namely that of being in an art gallery surrounded by “real” representations of reality rather than reality itself. Initially, Morgan likes the paintings. She says: “How *calm* great pictures make one feel. (...) I love these late Turners. Passionate turmoil held in perfect immobility. Elemental energy mysteriously constructed into space and light.” (FHD:228-9) Her reaction can be read as a comment on her quest. She experiences life as “passionate turmoil”, but seeks peace. The immobility of the paintings calms her, in contrast to her frantic journey in search of selfhood. The Turners are a consoling contrast to the life she lives, as she cannot escape the movement in time nor space.¹⁹¹

Beauty holds a central place in Murdoch’s philosophy, in that contemplation of the beautiful is an exercise in focusing one’s attention in what is other than self. However, art also repre-

¹⁹⁰ In *The Saint and the Artist*, Conradi comments (referring to characters in several novels, including *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*) on a Murdochian distinction between the good and bad man with reference to their attitude to art: the bad man does not care about art “because nothing apart from himself matters at all”. The good man “devalues art because, for the good man, art is second-best and rates only to the extent that something else (religion, morals, other people) matters more. The bad man evacuates meaning from art because the world is without sense, the good man because the sense of art depends upon and serves a larger sense outside it.” Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.111.

¹⁹¹ In a Tate Turner, *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*, the image is of an almost invisible monster beneath a beautiful sunrise. I find it easy to agree with Morgan (Murdoch) that it reveals “elemental energy mysteriously constructed in space and light”. Turner, J.M.W: *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*, c. 1845, Tate Gallery, London.

(http://www.artchive.com/artchive/T/turner/turner_sea_monsters.jpg.html, 19.09.2004)

sents the possibility of fantasy. Conradi gives a good summary of her attitude, which is relevant to understanding the development of the plot in the context where the characters are surrounded by great art:

The magical nature of art cannot be overestimated. It is an attempt to achieve omnipotence through personal fantasy and is the abode of wish-fulfilment and power mania. It is a prime producer of illusory unities. It both pretends to be more unified than it is, and allows us in reading (or looking, listening) to conceive of ourselves as more unified than we are. Art is an egoistic substitute for and copy of religious discipline. (...) All art lies, but good art lies its way into the truth, while bad art is simply bogus. Moreover since no art is perfect, all art partakes of a degree of moral ambiguity.¹⁹²

The idea that “good art” lies its way to the truth is compatible with Murdoch’s Platonic understanding of reality. Art is never other than representation. Art is like the fire in the cave, which illuminates more of reality than the puppets the cave-dwellers see to begin with, but it is not real. Art is a consoling substitute for reality. However, good art is better than bad art, because good art reveals more of reality than bad art ever can. One of Murdoch’s most quoted passages is the following. It establishes that the work of the good artist is a guide to reality, and points out that love (for what is other) is the ability to see clearly.

The great artist sees his objects (and this is true whether they are sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil) in a light of justice and mercy. The direction of attention is, contrary to nature, outward, away from self which reduces all to a false unity, towards the great surprising variety of the world, and the ability so to direct attention is love. (SOG:66)

For Murdoch, art, and attention to art, provides a model for understanding important aspects of morality. She writes about this link between art and moral life that

(...) the authority of the Good seems to us something necessary because the realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true, which is automatically at the same time a suppression of self. (SOG:66)

Thus, and significantly with respect to the problem of moral authority, it is important that clear vision, insight and attention to what is other is part of the “intellectual ability” to provide ‘good’ with authoritative status. This can illuminate why Morgan’s quest for insight, her search (albeit muddled and confused) for the truth about herself, is an important background to my discussion on what moral authority actually involves.

¹⁹² Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p. 41-42.

In the calmness of her experience of the paintings, Morgan says to Julius: “I’m beginning to see myself clearly at last.” (FHD:229). Her comments on the paintings, and attention to them, does indicate that she is more in touch with reality now than earlier (and, unfortunately, later). A characteristic of Morgan is that throughout the novel she continuously reaches new levels of what she believes to be insight. However, her judgement seldom proves to be sound. It is significant that she uses the phrase “see myself clearly” when surrounded by Turner’s paintings, which are, typically, hazy images. This could indicate that she sees nothing clearly. Her vision is blurred, like the paintings. The blurred vision implies that one should be wary of Morgan’s self-assessment in this passage.

Morgan says: “I was always stupidly in love. Then there was that *idea* with Tallis. Then you – “ (FHD:229). In her imagination, she has become free, and realises that in her adult life she has been like a slave. She is confused, though. On the one hand, she tells Julius that she is free from the enslavement of passion, yet she also tells him that she is not over him. Her words are contradictory. It is difficult to understand her. Julius senses this too, and tells her so. However, a certain degree of insight *is* reflected in the realization that her life’s loving has been “stupid”, in the sense that her earlier experiences of being in love have been destructive for her. She can see that she has been enslaved by the ideas of others, in particular Tallis’s and Julius’s. Their presence in her life as *ideas*, not real and equal people, is an important clue to her helplessness in relation to them. This is critical in the story of Morgan and her men.

None of Morgan’s relationships have been good for her. An aspect of her failure is interesting with respect to the interaction of the characters in this novel. A functioning relationship needs two parties to it. There must be a two-way movement, a dynamic of self and other. All her relationships (i.e. with Tallis, Julius, Rupert and Peter) are distorted, but they each represent a different manner of distortion. The distortion inherent in the Morgan/Tallis-relationship is that she sees only “the otherness” of Tallis. In relation to him, she seems to lose her sense of self. Such a loss is not identical to ‘unselfing’ (although it does point to the fact that this is an ambiguous relationship, as indicated in an earlier analysis of Tallis). This is in contrast to her relationships with Julius, Rupert or Peter, in which she ultimately sees only herself. She does not see the men as ‘others’, but as figures that define and solidify her ego. The true differences between self and other, or the reciprocity which constitutes an actual relationship, are thus blurred in Morgan’s interaction with other people. She does not see reality as it is. This pattern surfaces many times in the novel. An example is when Morgan realises that she is not over Julius, and thinks: “We shall never be finished with each other, *never*. This is only the

beginning of a drama which will last the whole of our lives. The thought was deeply consoling.” (FHD:233) It is significant that she includes both characters in her use of pronouns, while in fact the “us” is nothing but an extension of herself. The use of the word ‘consoling’ is an indication that the dramas of her love life falsify her perception of reality, although for Morgan herself consolation is not a negative concept. She is not a voice for Murdoch’s awareness of the dangers of fantasy.

In reaction to Morgan’s passionate declamations of love, Julius tells her “you attach too much importance to personal relationships.” (FHD:233) He sees himself as being external to this fundamental aspect of human life. His cynicism runs deep in the following speech to Morgan:

These things are not as important as you think, Morgan. They are flimsy and unreal. You want some sort of drama now, you want an ordeal of some kind, you don’t want to suffer in a dull way, and you want me to help you. But these are merely superficial agitations. Human beings are roughly constructed superficial entities full of indeterminacies and vagueness and empty spaces. Driven along by their own private needs they latch blindly onto each other, then pull away, then clutch again. Their little sadisms and their little masochisms are surface phenomena. Anyone will do to play the roles. They never really see each other at all. There is no relationship, dear Morgan, which cannot be quite easily broken and there is none the breaking of which is a matter of any genuine seriousness. Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes. (FHD:233)

This passage provides a background to the events which will produce disastrous results. Julius’s motivation for his actions can be found here, in this cynical view of human bonds. He has no faith in what he identifies as real love, the reality of an “in-between-ness” of people, a love which involves seeing the other, not only oneself. To him, the degenerate form of human love which people live by is destructive and destructible, and he wishes to prove it. Conradi uses Julius’s phrase “human beings are essentially finders of substitutes” as a clue to the central subject of the novel. I think this is right. There are several points to be made with reference to this. First, it illustrates the structure of the fraud which is central to the plot, in which the “affair” between Rupert and Morgan is in fact based on substitution of letters from other situations than the true context of the story. Secondly, it can be interpreted with reference to the twin-motif of the Simon/Morgan constellation, who are substitutes for each other in the narrative, both metaphorically and in their actions. Thirdly, it brings into play the theatrical theme. Acting is the ultimate example of substitution. A role can be played by a variety of actors. The role in the drama, or ordeal, which Morgan seeks, and which Julius points out that she is staging, can be filled with anyone. She is cast as a puppet in her own play.

This is a high point of the drama of the novel. In response to Julius's speech above, Morgan says hopefully and rather naïvely: "There are some relations which can't be broken." He tells her:

None, none. All human beings have staggeringly great faults which can be easily exploited by a clever observer. (...) I could divide anybody from anybody. Even you could. Play sufficiently on a person's vanity, sow a little mistrust, hint at the contempt which every human being deeply, secretly feels for every other one. Every man loves himself so astronomically more than he loves his neighbour. Anyone can be made to drop anyone. (FHD:233).

This is the recipe for disaster. It is an abstract description of what will happen between the characters in the remainder of the story. No actors are yet cast for the play, as "anyone" will do. Morgan does not believe it is possible, but Julius bets her that it can be done quickly, in ten days. She accepts the bet.

The wager strongly echoes the introduction to the book of Job. Here, God is challenged by the Adversary into testing Job's piety by depriving him of his possessions, health and family. The Adversary is a forerunner of Satan, and is in Hebrew texts an "angel whose task it is to roam the earth and expose human wrongdoing".¹⁹³ Julius is clearly a parallel figure to the Adversary. God grants the Adversary the power to test Job. This echoes Tallis having given up his power over Morgan (the human, parallel to Job) to Julius, who is seemingly all-powerful. The Adversary's task of "exposing human wrongdoing" is central to discussing the ambiguity of Julius.

Talking about the possible victims of the experiment, Julius suggests Axel and Simon, joking that he would rather like to have Simon for himself. Morgan shows an empathy of which Julius shows no sign. She does not wish to hurt Simon:

'It seems so unkind now that it's real people!'

'But no one would really suffer, that's part of my point. I'd do this in the most *angelic* manner.'

'Oh, Julius – You know, in a way I really think it might be good for Simon. I do feel Axel rather forced it on him. And I doubt if they're really happy. I'm sure they torment each other.' (FHD:234).

The use of the adjective "angelic", which Julius uses in reference to his actions, corresponds to the Jobian imagery mentioned above. Further, there is a subtle transition from idea to reality as the framework of the plot is filled with people. Morgan is putty in the hands of Julius,

¹⁹³ Greenberg, Moshe: "Job", in: Alter, Robert and Frank Kermode (eds.): *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, London 1987, p.284.

and is easily manipulated into thinking it would be “good for Simon”. Julius manages to convince her that there will be no suffering, and she is willing to believe him. Again, she seems to have no mind of her own. This is further demonstrated when they leave the museum to go for a drink together. She looks at the Turners, thinking: “She could now see how limited and amateurish they really were.” (FHD:235) She takes on Julius’ view of the paintings and of reality, thus losing her sense of self.

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In the analysis of this chapter there are several issues of ethical significance. In the discussion about art, reality and morality I introduced central aspects of my treatment of moral authority. One concerns the mimetic nature of art. Art *is not* reality, but can nevertheless contribute to seeing reality more clearly. This, of course, applies both to the visual as well as literary arts. Further, Murdoch’s views here are similar to Bakhtin’s insistence on the representational nature of the novel. The relation between art and reality can thus be understood by the metaphor of polyphony, in which the artist who sees and represents is an external voice entering into the internal dialogism of reality. This provides me with an argument for seeing literature as a relevant “place” for discussing ethical theory in that in interaction with artistic representations of reality, the dialogue is expanded and thus becomes more “true” to reality.

Secondly, issues of power (and redistribution of power) are, as I discussed in the initial discussions of authority in Part I, key themes to study with respect to morality. In this and the previous chapters, the power-relations between Morgan and Julius are precisely the kind of hierarchical relations which I have argued against. Analysis of this relationship provides models for understanding central theoretical aspects of the problem of moral authority. Reciprocal relationality in structures of network, not hierarchy (which is so far non-existent in all Morgan’s relationships) is an important aspect of conceptualising “truths” which can reasonably be held. This is in accordance with the understanding of substantial, not formal, moral authority.

g) The Restaurant Scene (Chapter 20)

The main reason for a close reading of Chapter 20 is that the Platonic allegory of the cave is strongly activated, and there is also a resurfacing of Biblical themes. These intertextual references are both central to the discussions of characters in Part V. The narrator’s voice is in the foreground in this chapter, a chapter with more action than most. In the first half, the narrator is personal, focalising Simon’s perspective. In the second half, the narrator is more distant and

describes the external action. This change of narrative perspective is sudden. An interesting aspect of such a transition, which occurs several times in the novel, is how knowledge of the inner life of a character gives rise to a more sympathetic attention to his or her actions in the passages following the internal perspective than might otherwise have been the case. It is difficult to ignore someone whose emotions one has become familiar with. Thus, although Simon is described as externally as the others in the second half of the chapter, the reader sees the action from a point of view grounded in *his* experience. A further aspect of this, is that the empathic relationship the reader experiences at different times with most of the characters, is a device which in a sense gives an unfair impression of Julius as his inner perspective is never represented by the narrator.

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The situation is this: Simon, Axel, Julius and Tallis are all to meet for a meal at a Chinese restaurant. Simon arrives first. While he is sitting alone waiting for the others, a long passage renders his thoughts. Simon worries about the evening ahead, and about his relationship with Axel. He is fearful, feeling a widening gap between himself and Axel. Not knowing how to handle either of the problems, he decides to just wait and see what happens. This passive attitude to his own life has been characteristic of Simon so far. He desperately wishes that he had told Axel about the incident at Julius's flat: "It was impossible to tell him now. This secretiveness not only constituted, what Axel had always adjured him against a lie, it also made the incident itself curiously potent with psychological consequences." (FHD:237) The secret, which in effect is a lie, makes the situation between the partners uncomfortable. Their intimacy is challenged by the lack of truthfulness. A point here, is that secrecy involves an imbalance of power, and is thus a hindrance to healthy and just relationships. True intimacy in a relation is seen as good, and a situation of distrust contributes to the gradual disintegration of intimacy. Aspects of power/powerlessness in Simon's story can be seen in the light of this. His increasing truthfulness, and thereby his empowerment, is a significant aspect of the maturing relationship between the two men.

Simon recalls a recurring dream. As often in the novel, dreams are important images which provide access to the mind of the characters. Simon's dream reflects issues of powerlessness and the experience of having something concealed from him, and out of his reach. What it is he desires, is not clear to him. This frustrates him. However, this mental outreach for what is beyond and intangible is important in Simon's narrative and central to his (moral) awareness and development. The primary images of the dream concern memories from when he was a

small boy at school. He used to wait for letters from home, but was too small to reach up to his pigeon-hole. He would have to wait for bigger boys to help him by lifting him up. These pigeon-holes have reappeared in his dreams as an adult:

Very greatly enlarged and deepened, they became portentuous windows out of the deeply recessed interiors of which Simon was always wanting to look at some brightly coloured scene of intense interest. Only the hole through which he wanted to look was always out of his reach. He would climb upwards towards it, mounting on piles of crumbling collapsing boxes or precarious scaffolding, or sometimes climbing endless stairs. The scene itself when, now and then, he managed to glimpse it through the long shaft of the pigeon-hole, was always strangely separated from the rest of the dream, a weird landscape perhaps, or strange animals at play. It inspired painful excitement. But awful anxiety attached to the clambering up. Very occasionally in the dreams someone actually lifted him up, and this feeling of powerful hands gripping him about the waist revived the old terrible sensation of shame. In so far as he could identify the lifter up it was usually his father or Rupert. In his most recent pigeon-hole dreams Simon had realised on waking with extreme distress that the person who had lifted him up had been Julius. (FHD:237-8)

This is the second of Simon's dreams which the reader is introduced to. In both of them Rupert and the father are prominent figures of power, and the mother an ambiguous symbol of love. In the analysis of the earlier dream, it was pointed out that the dream was a symbol of Simon's development towards psychological adulthood. The present dream can also be seen as an image of Simon's journey towards maturity. It also outlines some of the challenges involved in this process. There are several interesting points to be made concerning the character Simon and of his relationship with Axel, and of Murdoch's Platonic ideas of moral development in general.

First, this pigeon-hole-dream echoes Plato's allegory of the cave. This myth is structurally similar to the bildungsroman-schema of a movement of "home-wilderness-home". In this dream, it can be argued that the pigeon-holes are symbolic windows by which Simon's attention is directed out of his inner life, from the "deeply recessed interiors" of his unconscious psyche. His inner life, his psyche, is formed by his childhood. Childhood images therefore represent the unconscious self. In a sense, therefore, he is a child looking out to the still unreachable life of the adult Simon. The pigeon-holes are reminiscent of the mouth of a cave seen from the inside. They are the point of access to the bright reality of the sunlit exterior of conscious maturity. (Moral) maturity in the Murdochian schema is to experience true love. This is only possible by shedding the ego, and thus being enabled to see self in the light of the sun (the good). Simon, both in the dream and in the story in general, senses that there is a truth beyond him which he cannot grasp on his own. He does not have the power, or ability,

within himself to clamber out of the cave of darkness, nor to escape the confusion of his life. He is blinded by his ego. In contrast to Morgan, however, who is also mesmerized by her ego, Simon is represented as one who is aware that he must strive beyond this darkness. Morgan thinks she has arrived in the free “outside”. It is this awareness that gives Simon the potential to reach a degree of maturity which will exceed Morgan’s.

Secondly, the power of Eros is what can lead him out of the “cave”. Eros, or desire, has been introduced earlier as in itself a neutral power, which can focus one’s attention on self *or* the other. In contrast to Simon, all of Morgan’s erotic attention is focused on *herself*, in her many misguided attempts of self-validation. Erotic (in the broad sense) attention to the *other* is a fundamental image of the process of unselfing, of seeing beyond oneself. Simon is genuinely worried about Axel’s emotional situation, and his compassion is deeply felt. His desire for uncluttered intimacy with Axel is therefore very different from Morgan’s desire for the men in her life.

Thirdly, the dream raises issues of power and powerlessness. The pigeon-holes of Simon’s childhood are the little boy’s window to the world outside the confinement of school. He was a frightened boy. The memory of this is still present in his adult selfhood. In the dream, he longs for the love of his mother, who sends him letters. However, he cannot reach this outer world without the help of someone more powerful than himself. This indicates an aspect of the nature of the relationship between him and Axel, who is the more paternal partner. Thus, Axel is to be interpreted as “one of the big boys”, someone to whom Simon surrenders his power in order to reach what he dreams of – namely true and unconditional love. For Simon, to surrender his power to Axel is not to victimize himself or to choose subordination and suffering, as Morgan does in relation to Julius. It is more like a subtle humility, as exemplified in the role-changing game the couple played earlier. However, the balance of power in the Axel-Simon-relationship is neither uncomplicated nor perfect. Simon’s sexuality is deeply connected with fear, which is clear here as well as in several other places in the novel. In this dream too, his erotic force, his passion, involves shame. He realises that the power to ascend is not his own. The father, Rupert, Axel and Julius are all stronger men. Their power over Simon is an important aspect of his story. However, Simon is released through a gradual empowerment of himself. It is also important to notice that although Axel often seems to be the partner with power, Axel and Simon’s roles in the relationship are not fixed. This power-balance between them is a key to their happiness, although they quite often find themselves off balance during the story.

Fourthly, Simon sees images of strange landscapes and animals through the windows. The reality of the exterior is perceived as something disconnected from the rest of the dream, or in other words, the reality of the cave. What he sees is obscure to him. It is not part of his reality. Nevertheless, he strives towards reaching this ideal land outside himself. Further, the animal-motif is important, because this has been identified as a symbol of humanity. However, what is appearance and what is reality, and why the animals belong in the exterior world, is hard to tell at this stage. Simon, as well as the reader, is in the midst of a quest, and it is difficult at this stage to distinguish what is what.

This kind of Platonic imagery is also present in another aspect of the scene in the restaurant in which Simon is sitting. The lighting in the cave-cellar-room is artificial. "The restaurant was lit by neon strip lighting and made a bright cold rather sickly impression after the blue misty light outside." (FHD:238) What happens in the restaurant does not represent perfection, nor true insight. There is nevertheless a certain level of understanding and truthfulness (the fire as a step closer to the truth than seeing shadows on the wall). The lighting indicates that the scene does not provide final answers concerning the ideas of good and evil, but is still enlightening.

The focus of the text changes from the internal focalization of Simon, to narration of the external situation. Although still seen from Simon's perspective, the narrator describes the action. Sitting in the restaurant, Simon thinks at first that the room is empty. Then he sees a group of people in the corner. Something about the atmosphere is strange. From a distance, Simon tries to make out what is happening. He watches them in horror. This is one of several examples in the novel which portray Simon as a passive, frightened observer, without power to act. He sees a group of young men harassing a Jamaican man, who is beaten until he bleeds. The whole scene exudes an impression of silence and slow motion. This creates a representational awareness, as if we are watching a film within the novel. Simon cannot quite see what is happening, there is a mental distance between him and the narrator, who seems to know. He can, however, tell that it is violent: "He both detested and feared violence of any description. He had never experienced it and had scarcely ever glimpsed it. His immediate instinct was to keep absolutely still." (FHD:239) Simon's stillness is an instinctive action. He resembles a small animal in danger. The focal point of the scene abruptly moves towards what is actually happening in the room, like a film camera shifting its angle from a close shot with voice-over to an explosion of space and sound. The reader "sees" and "hears" the youths verbally and physically abuse the man. The point of view is still Simon's, and he thinks: "Why

doesn't he cry out? (...) How can he be silent like that?" (FHD:240) This is interesting, because the words apply not only to the Jamaican, but to himself (although he is unaware of this). He then becomes angry, gets up from his chair, and walks towards the action. He feels faint from fright. Nevertheless, he intervenes, telling the youths to stop.

The observer has acted. This is an important turning-point for Simon. He will still act as the silent observer in places in the novel, but here is a clue as to what is the right course of action in Simon's development of selfhood: his identification with the sufferer brings him out of himself, and empowers him to engage in the situation. His compassion has won out over his inwards-looking self-awareness. The members of the gang turn their attention to Simon: "Look who's here, (...). A fucking queer. Listen to his squeaky little voice." (FHD:240). The "squeaky voice" identifies Simon with a small animal. Someone in the gang grips his arm and twists it, another is swinging a bicycle chain. "Simon knew now why the Jamaican had not cried out. He could not have uttered a sound. He waited for the blow." (FHD:240). It is important here to notice that a small voice is better than none. Having no voice signifies suffering, or lack of power. Voice is a symbol of a sense of self. When Simon uses his voice, it represents a first step towards empowerment. His problem with Axel also has much to do with voicelessness. Simon suffers, because he keeps quiet about what has happened between him and Julius, which, in fact is nothing much. His secrecy leads to unnecessary suffering, and could have been countered by the power of raising his voice and telling the truth. From this point of view, voice, power and dignity belong together. The door to the restaurant opens, and Simon hears Axel's voice: "What on earth is going on here?" (FHD:240) Axel's voice is stronger than Simon's, indicating that there is still an imbalance of power between them. The men let Simon go. He moves away. From now on Simon is no longer the focal centre.

Julius and Axel arrive together. Julius is vicious in his morbid interest in the violence. "Julius's face [was] alight with thrilled fascinated interest." (FHD:241) This is one of the times where his actual behaviour unambiguously coincides with what one would expect of a bad person. However, it is necessary to remember that the reader has no access to his inner reaction, and may thus be treating him unjustly. Then something important happens:

Tallis moved in from behind Julius and before anyone could shift or cry out he had struck the youth very hard across the side of the face. He struck him with the flat of his hand but with such violence that the boy staggered back against his companions and almost fell to the floor.

Simon clenched his fists. If there were a general fight now he felt he was ready for it. Axel was staring at Tallis with an air of puzzlement. Julius was smiling with irrepressible delight. Tallis stood hunched like an animal. (FHD: 241)

The youths run out, swearing as they go. The second real action of the novel (after Morgan's stripping in Julius' flat) has taken place. Tallis's behaviour counters earlier experiences of him. The impression has been that Tallis is incapable of violence. This is proven to be wrong. That Tallis resembles an animal after the deed is an indication that he is bridging the gap between his idealism and transcendence on the one hand, and, on the other, being a human, a person who truly interacts with others. This change in Tallis is central to the novel, both with respect to the narrative development and to the thematic significance. Until now, it has been difficult to see that Tallis is a transfiguration of Christ. More often than not, he is more like a perversion of Christ, a pathetic figure without self respect or dignity. As this passage marks a turning point for Simon, it also marks a fundamental change in Tallis's story. Both of them act physically. The interaction with others is not mental. They are both of flesh and blood. Bodies touch bodies. This is particularly poignant concerning Tallis. His ethereal quality is transformed into real human interaction. The Christ-like Tallis, the personification of good, has become incarnated. This is the pivotal point of his story, the moment at which his true goodness comes into being. It is also significant that Tallis moves up from behind Julius, who has been in the foreground of the story for a long time. Good is catching up with evil. A further indication of the transfiguration is that Tallis's action enables Simon to clench his fist, willing to fight the good fight. Thus, in a sense he is a disciple, a follower of Christ. His name is also significant in this respect, as *Simon* Peter was the first disciple.

The time and perspective suddenly changes in mid-chapter. This is unusual, and therefore adds to the impact of the dramatic action of the scene. The narrator does not tell us, but the reader realises that the scene has changed. It is two hours later, and Julius has joined Simon and Axel in their house. Tallis, however, has (mysteriously) disappeared from the group (echoing the ascension?). The others are drinking whisky and are excited. They discuss what has happened. Julius's reaction is significant. He had watched the whole episode with glee. The adjectives he uses are "perfect", "glorious" and "terrific". He seems almost sexually aroused by the violence: "Julius's eyes were gleaming with pleasure, his moist lips slightly parted" (FHD:241). His reaction is completely devoid of empathy or compassion and he sees the whole situation as pure entertainment. Recall his words to Morgan, "Suffering can be amusing". Axel comments to Julius that he acted in character, just watching the action. Again, this indicates that Julius does not take part in human relationships, but stands in an external position from which he looks at people, making no actual mental or physical identification with them. This observational role is very different from Simon's, as Julius seems to have

taken such a position by choice, whereas Simon is too frightened to do anything else. Julius is capable of manipulating the others, but never actually physically interacts with any of the characters. His delight in the suffering and pain of the others is uncomfortable, and the images of him in this chapter are close to demonic.

This is the last chapter in Part I, which indicates its importance. The transformation of Tallis from a pathetic and powerless “idea” to an actual “human being”, angry enough to challenge injustice with physical intervention, is the climax of the chapter, and also to a certain extent of the whole novel. This is where the battle between good and evil truly begins. From studies of the development of both Simon’s and Tallis’s stories, it has been an issue that they are both on their way (albeit differently) to moral maturity, or rather, integration. For both, this involves empowerment. Further, the empowerment is contextual, interactive and relational. Such images, as they are developed in the narrative of this chapter, correspond to the network-metaphor of power that circulates as the image of power and authority – a root-image of the relational, substantial and motivational understanding of moral authority that I am developing.

This chapter has also, in a somewhat different manner from earlier, thematised the concept of ‘unselfing’. Unselfing, by way of a loving desire for the other, is, according to Murdoch, an ongoing (moral) process which is inherently relational. The contribution at this stage can be identified with reference to the journey-motif which is implied in the intertextual relation to the allegory of the cave. Murdoch is sceptical to the Kantian-existentialist idea of moral development which she visualises as a “leap of the will” (SOG:26). For her, the metaphor of journey is more apt. The attempts to “climb out of the cave” involves much anxiety and fumbling, as does human life. But if the power of Eros is directed towards the other, to good, to the true light at the mouth of the cave, it is a climb in the right direction. Thus, although Simon is confused, frightened and ashamed, his quest is one which brings him deeper insight. Simon is thus cast as the ideal representative of moral development, however flawed.

8.2. Central Scenes and Passages in Part Two

The action accelerates in Part Two, as Julius actually begins his game of couple-destruction in earnest. In the opening chapters there is a significant change in the narrator’s role and perspective. There is a distance between the narrator, the story and the reader which was not present earlier. In Part One, the narrator is omniscient, and taken for granted by the reader. In the beginning of Part Two, there is a “glass wall” between the story and the reader. The narrator

has little foreknowledge, while the reader finds that she knows more than the narrator. It is as if the telling of the story starts again, with new introductions to the characters. The scenes are seen from a perspective which makes it obvious to the reader that the characters misunderstand each other, but where the narrator is seemingly oblivious. It is uncomfortable knowledge. A reader knows that what the narrator says does not necessarily correspond to what is happening. Thus, one of the fundamental themes of the novel, the problem of appearance versus reality comes vividly to the foreground.

The first two chapters of Part Two consist of Rupert's reflections on his life in relation to Hilda and Morgan, the first letters between Morgan and Rupert, and of Julius's manipulation of Morgan into believing that Rupert is not thriving in his marriage with Hilda. These two chapters also recap much of Part One, but from a slightly different perspective. The interior monologue and the dialogue shows clearly that the characters by now are caught in the web of lies which Julius has spun round them.

a) Puppets and Puppet-master (Chapter 3)

In the third chapter of Part Two several of the novel's sub-themes come to the foreground. These are Simon's "pilgrim's process", the theatre-motif, and the beginning distortion of the relationship between Rupert and Morgan. Simon and Julius are together in a room of neo-classical interiors by Robert Adam in the Prince Regent museum, the museum in which Simon works. The room suggests a Greek tragedy. In fact, the scene turns out to be theatrical. Another meaning of the interior is revealed in the stark contrast between the austere forms of the style of interior and the messy content of the scene.

The room is where Morgan in "her" letter (manipulated and sent by Julius) had asked Rupert to meet her. Julius has invited Simon to see what he calls "a puppet show". They find some chairs and hide behind a curtain. Simon has no idea what is going on. He does not want to be there. He senses that something is very wrong, but finds that he cannot resist staying in order to see what will happen. He is under Julius's strong influence, having submitted to his power. "He had done what Julius asked him to do because Julius had insisted. Julius's will had simply taken him captive." (FHD:263) This is characteristic of the immature Simon. His journey towards empowerment and moral maturity is slow and winding. Julius has robbed him of his mental freedom, and this is an interesting aspect of Julius's behaviour. He "takes captive" the mind of others. Morgan has also reflected upon this, using similar words. Julius makes Simon stay to see what he calls a love scene between people they know, "a midsummer enchant-

ment”. (FHD:263) This reference to Shakespearian myth refers back to the garden party, which I argue is a cameo of the novel. In addition, it gives connotations to the enchanter-role which is typical of Murdoch’s evil characters.¹⁹⁴

Rupert and Morgan arrive. Simon is horrified when he realises what he is about to see. Simon has returned to the role of the passive, powerless and confused spectator, which is another “proof” that there is no straight and easy direction of moral development. The scene is observed from the perspective of the hiding place. Simon is deeply uncomfortable with the secrecy. He cannot make sense of what he is watching. This is typical. In the dream recalled in Part I’s Chapter 20, the landscapes beyond the pigeon-holes had been “weird”. He could not understand them. Neither could he quite understand what was going on in the restaurant, until he discarded his observation-mode and made himself known by actually intervening in the injustice which was taking place. The truth is elusive to him, because his fear and shame so often force him to refrain from action. This is the background for the oddness of the conversation between Rupert and Morgan, which is seen from Simon’s point of view, from a distance. There are many unknown details, not only for Simon, but also for the reader. What did the letter from Rupert to Morgan say? What exactly has happened? The reader knows that Julius is involved, but not yet what he has done.

The words exchanged between Morgan and Rupert are not actually of much interest, apart from Rupert saying: “As I see it, it’s not a matter of going *round* love, it’s a matter of going *through* love – through to a better love – much more sober, much more realistic. Nothing awful can happen.” (FHD:265) Rupert’s words appear to be sensible and convincing. However, what he is actually saying is not easy to understand. In addition, they are inappropriate to the situation. This leads back to the centre of Rupert’s story and challenge, i.e. that his ideals are disconnected from his actual life and actions. However, Morgan is enthralled by him (or rather, by the flattering situation). They talk about the need for secrecy, how all has changed, how they have known each other for so long, and how Hilda must not be hurt. They leave the room, and continue their conversation in the park. Morgan feels that the room in the museum is “eerie”. Again, she senses that something is wrong, but is much less aware of the truth than Simon. He, like Socrates, acknowledges that he knows nothing. She believes that she has finally seen the truth.

¹⁹⁴ To this, see a discussion of The Enchanter Figure in Heusel: *Iris Murdoch’s Paradoxical Novels*, p.110-111. Here, she points out that the enchanters are often cast as victims of power, several of them “Eastern Europeans displaced by war” – which we later learn is the case in Julius’s history.

When Morgan and Rupert leave, Simon feels Julius shudder: “Now there was a low gurgling sound. Julius was laughing, his fingers stuffed in his mouth. He fell off the packing case onto the floor, ‘Oh, beautiful!’ (FHD:265) As earlier, Julius laughs or smiles when something unpleasant is happening. His laughter has an uncomfortable quality to it. It is not humorous. Simon is terrified. He says: “It was a *demon* thing to do.” (FHD:266) It is interesting that he uses ‘demon’ as a noun, and not the adjective “demonic”. It suggests that Julius *is* evil, and that this evilness is present in the disastrous liaison between Rupert and Morgan. Julius, however, does not take Simon’s worries seriously. Simon asks what Julius has done, and he says: “Never mind the details, my pet. Call it magic if you like.” (FHD:266) The enchanters in Murdoch’s novels are also often referred to as “magicians”. Conradi comments that these figures often, ironically, expose “deep truth”.¹⁹⁵ The ambivalence in Julius, manipulator but “truth-revealing” is to be noted. Julius explains to Simon what makes the plot work, “exposing the machinery”, so to speak. He plays games with the weaknesses of the characters, in particular pride and vanity:

You see, each of them imagines that he has inspired a grand passion in the other. Each thinks the other is madly in love! Thus each will take the initiative instead of drawing back. Each will chivalrously imagine that he protects and elevates the other! Thus chivalry and vanity will lead them deeper in. (...) Vanity not love conducts their feet. Each of them is thrilled and flattered at being an object of worship. That is all their love would probably amount to in any case. (...) Don’t worry. I will undo the enchantment later. No one will be seriously hurt. Two very conceited persons will be sadder and wiser, that’s all.” (FHD:266-7)

Julius insists that Axel is not to be told. Simon would not dare to, as Julius has managed to contrive the whole situation in a way that would make Axel believe that Simon had been pursuing Julius, and not the other way round. Julius is working his claws into this relationship as well. He uses the jealousy and secrecy-issues which are at the core of Simon and Axel’s difficulties, just as he uses the issues of chivalry and vanity of Morgan and Rupert. Thus, all the victims of Julius’s game are trapped by their weaknesses and vices. Further, Julius plays games with Simon’s insecurity, and tells him that his love is illusory. He plays the tempting serpent in paradise. Julius tempts Simon by triggering his little fears, and by soothing and boosting his ego:

I don’t want to upset your little applecart, but it grieves me to see you so full of illusions. Human loves don’t last, Simon, they are far too egoistic. (...) At present you think you are happy knuckling under to Axel and giving way to his moods and ill-

¹⁹⁵ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.15.

tempers. But human beings cannot live without power any more than they can live without water. Of course the weak can often rule the strong through nagging and sulking and spite. You choose at present to give in. But every time you give in you notice it. Later perhaps you will make Axel's life a misery. Then gradually the balance will tilt. You will get tired of being Axel's lapdog. You are not at all monogamous really, my dear Simon. You miss your adventures, you know you do. (...) I don't say this to discourage you, but simply out of kindness so that you should not suffer too great a disappointment later on. (FHD:269-70)

Again, Julius explicitly distances himself from humanity. He also appears to be omniscient, which is an extension from the earlier "externality". His power is growing. He knows which buttons to press in order to escalate the other characters' insecurity and self-love. In several ways in the passage above, Julius points out a very central issue in Simon's quest for self-hood, namely the issue of power. When Julius indicates that power is as important to human life as water is, he points out the complexity and problems of balancing power in relationships. The victim, the sufferer, or the weak has the potential to rule over the strong. Such negative power leads to as much misery as the violent power of the strong. Someone who suffers seeks consolation, and is as encumbered by the ego as the one who inflicts suffering. This aspect of Julius's speech is relevant to the next thing that happens: Simon finds the strength to command Julius to get out. Julius continues his sweet-tongued tirade. Simon tells him again to leave, and Julius obeys. Here, Simon is strong. He manages to stand against what he finds malicious and evil, and is no longer captivated. In this empowerment, Simon has taken another step towards maturity and the problem of balancing powers in his life.

*

In addition to Simon's empowerment and the tightening of the plot, the theatrical theme surfaces explicitly in this chapter. Rupert and Morgan are watched through a curtain, as if they were actors or puppets masterminded by someone else, which they are. In many of Shakespeare's plays, most notably in *Hamlet*,¹⁹⁶ there is a play within the play which convey the centre of the plot. This scene is at the heart of the action plotted by Julius. The arranged secret rendezvous is crucial to his strategy to wreck havoc in Rupert and Hilda's marriage. Further, the scene is destructive of more than one relationship. By describing it from Simon's perspective, the whole issue of deception is brought to the fore. He becomes even further bound by secrets, which now involve more people and therefore create more complex problems than those he already has.

¹⁹⁶ Shakespeare, William: *Hamlet* in: *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare* London 1987. General editors: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (p.1121-1164).

What is unique in this scene with relation to Shakespeare, is that the puppet-show is more than just art mimicking reality in order to cast a clear light on what is true (as for instance the stage-play within *Hamlet* does). Here, a fiction turns into reality. What appears to be a genuine affair, even to the lovers, is purely a game, a construction. A deeper aspect of the theatre as metaphor, is therefore the thematization of the complex difference between appearance and reality. Is what happens in this scene “real”? It happens, but has an untrue ring to it. The love between Morgan and Rupert is not love, it is an artistic representation of vanity staged by the artist Julius. Thus, the scene is a meta-commentary on the double nature of art. Art can through manipulation of reality show something of the nature of an even deeper reality, here, the inadequacy of human love. Through contemplation of the falsity, one’s awareness of what is true can come to life. A further aspect of the intertwining of reality and the puppet-show, is that the characters become the roles they have been given. In a sense they thereby lose their individuality. An actor can be substituted for another actor, and this proves Julius’s earlier point, that “human beings are essentially finders of substitutes”. The point is here that the love between Morgan and Rupert is explicitly portrayed as being false love, a manipulated enactment directed by a puppet-master. Neither of them truly sees the other. It is part of Julius’s attempt to prove the inadequacy of human love. Any actor could be cast as the object of their love, which, in fact, is nothing but love of self.

b) Morgan in the Underground (Chapter 10)

This chapter has symbolic significance in the novel, in particular to Morgan’s story. There are references to the allegory of the cave, as well as to Biblical motifs. I also identify several other symbols of interest to my analysis. The chapter is constructed well, and the narrative incorporates several levels of meaning. Morgan is travelling through London, and sees a pigeon trapped in the Underground. The story moves subtly between the trapped pigeon, Morgan’s mental state, and her recollections from a ghastly meeting between herself and Rupert, which had taken place the evening before. The chapter begins with the narrator’s description of the bird, and Morgan’s reaction to seeing it. Bird-imagery, which is often connected with Morgan, is strongly focused in this chapter. The pigeon and Morgan are to a certain extent intertwined. Through her unconscious identification with it, she (and the reader) begins to understand her fears and worries.

The pigeon was standing, almost invisible in the corner, behind a pile of wooden planks, just at the bottom of the first escalator on the Bakerloo side in Piccadilly Circus station. Morgan saw it with an immediate sick thrill of pain and fear.

She passed it by. She stopped and came back. (...) She looked down at the pigeon. It

stood there immobile, well back in the corner, its eye bright and inexpressive. Many people were passing by, most of them coming down the escalator. (...) No one paid any attention to Morgan or the pigeon.

Morgan stood there as motionless as the bird and her heart beat as hard. She had seen Rupert last night. It had been a terrible evening. (FHD:325)

When Morgan sees the bird, her immediate reaction is strong. From the ambiguous wording, it is not clear whether her “sick thrill”, the emotional reaction of pain and fear, is on behalf of the pigeon or herself. The effect is a blurred distinction between the two. Throughout the passage Morgan and the pigeon become one. They represent nonentity. They are isolated, unseen and fundamentally alone. The simile (likeness) is extended to a concrete physical identification between them: their motionlessness and their heartbeats are the same. They are different and separate from each other, yet their sameness is more dominant in the present chapter. This metaphoric duality re-introduces the motif of “sameness and difference” which has been relevant to several other instances of Morgan’s story. It was particularly prominent in her ambiguous identification with Simon, and Tallis’s identification with her as his other half, both as wife and twin.

This chapter can be read from several perspectives: on the one hand, it is important as the climax of the idiosyncratic aspect of Morgan’s story. It is a dramatic turning-point in her personal journey towards wholeness, integrity and a more mature identity (which she never reaches). On the other hand, it is a chapter in which Morgan’s story increasingly becomes a symbol of the human soul. The meaning transcends the particularity of her experience, and her narrative can illuminate a larger pattern of human moral development. Her story provides a model of progress (or lack of such), which to a large extent coincides with Murdoch’s moral anthropology. From yet another point of view, the chapter also has cosmic/metaphysic references. These three dimensions of meaning (the particular story of Morgan, the universally human, and the cosmic/metaphysic dimension) echo the Platonic hierarchy of realities: different levels of meaning and clarity stand in an analogous relation to each other, each of them building towards the next level. Seen from such a point of view, it could be argued that the deep-structure of the novel in effect portrays that which is particular and personal as being a lesser level of truth, a degree of illusion which the self must transcend in order to see the Murdochian-Platonic understanding of the unity of everything in the light of the good.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ This is, however, not as simple as it could seem, and reflects several misunderstandings as to what Plato’s theory actually involves. I return to a discussion of this in Part IV, Chapter 11.

The narrative continues with the narrator's description of Morgan's memory of the evening before. Some time has passed since the affair had started. The readers know, and Morgan and Rupert are beginning to realise, that Hilda is becoming suspicious of her husband and sister. Several hints from Julius have indicated to her that something is amiss in her marriage. Hilda had phoned Morgan's flat, and the phone had gone on ringing for twenty minutes. The sound drove Rupert to a break-down. He has become ridden with guilt over Hilda, and does not want things to continue as they are with Morgan. Morgan saw him as "undignified and pathetic" (FHD:325). They quarrelled as to who actually started the affair. Both blamed the other. It is beginning to dawn on them that something is wrong. Something has backfired in their fantasy that "love really does solve all problems" (FHD:255), which Rupert always believed to be true. Of course neither of them ever imagine that their so-called love could be an illusion. They cannot yet imagine that what appears to be love is just a constructed plot, a manipulated deception.

The narrator changes the theme abruptly. From Morgan's internal recollection of the evening before, the focus is turned outwards, to her physical surroundings in the Underground. The following passage contains one of the novel's many images which are reminiscent of the cave allegory:

Morgan thought, even if I can't catch it, if I could only drive it up to the upper part of the station, it might see the daylight through one of the exits and fly out. It would have more chance of survival there than if it stays down here. The idea of the bird trapped in that warm dusty electric-lighted underground place filled her heart with pity and horror. (FHD:327)

Morgan tries to save the pigeon. Every time she gets close, however, the bird flies away. She cannot reach it. When she has chased it up the escalator, the bird flies back down to the bottom. Her compassion for the bird directs her attention away from herself. This is significant with respect to her process of 'unselfing'. Further, because of the identification between Morgan and the bird, she is, in effect, helping herself. She is beginning to find her own real self, her true identity.¹⁹⁸ The imagery of juxtaposition of and identification between Morgan and the bird continues for quite some time. Morgan's desperation increases when she realises that the bird cannot find its way out to the daylight. She is frustrated each time it flies back down again, although she tries to help it up and out. She is caught in a dilemma as to how she best

¹⁹⁸ To rephrase Ricoeur's words, she sees *herself as another*. The dynamic of selfhood as both "same and other" is a central aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of self. This element of his ethical hermeneutics correspond closely to Morgan's story of (moral) development.

can save the pigeon, and worries that whatever she does, it will die. Either it will die from the fright from a human touch, or from suffocation in the underground.

There is much emotional tension in this passage. The dilemma concerning the pigeon echoes her psychological state: her story leads her from one disaster to the next. This is analogous to the bird that continuously flies back down into the underground. Morgan tries to run away from danger by running deeper down into what, metaphorically speaking, is her own cave of untruths. Her present panic and fear, which she feels on behalf of the pigeon, is an indication of the parallel dilemma she (unconsciously) faces in her own life. She fears true intimacy (represented here by human touch), and yet her identity is suffocating in the depths of deception around which her life revolves.

After a while, Morgan realises that she has lost her handbag. She is trapped in the Underground with neither ticket nor money. This represents her total helplessness. She is experiencing a metaphoric death, in which she has nothing to console her. It feels like a nightmare, and she has neither the power nor material goods to get away, to save herself from the situation. She “is” the bird, the small and suffering animal that cannot save itself from the underground entrapment. “Oh, *hell*, thought Morgan, all the rest and this as well.” (FHD:329). The phrase indicates a subconscious acknowledgement of what she is going through.

Until now, she has seemed to be alone in the Underground, apart from the bird and the shadowy ghost-like figures of her fellow travellers. Then a shift in the story happens. Tallis appears to arrive on the scene. She thinks she sees him on an escalator going down. He is literally descending into her hell:

When she was half way up the escalator she suddenly saw Tallis. He was standing on the opposite escalator going down, gliding slowly downward towards her, standing in the long line of people on the right-hand side of the escalator. At first she was not sure whether it really was Tallis or whether it was one of the men whom she now noticed all the time who seemed momentarily to resemble him. The scene shimmered and shook before her eyes, the row of blurred faces moved onward with mesmeric slowness, Morgan gripped the moving handrail, wanting to call out to him, but her tongue was leaden and a sort of large bright humming electric silence all about her held her motionless and wordless. Yes, it was really Tallis. Separated now from the hazy frieze of other forms, she saw his face clearly, anxious, sad, and beautiful-eyed. He was gazing far away and did not seem to see her. Then he was gone, sinking downward past her, and a moment later Morgan was stumbling off the escalator at the top. (FHD:329)

The escalators in the London Underground going up and down can be interpreted in the light of the two visual images (which are connected to each other). The first is the Platonic cave-parable, the second is the traditional Christian (Dantean) image of hell as an “underworld”. In

The Republic, Plato describes how the person who manages to ascend from the rough cave to the sunlight outside, decides to *descend back into the cave* in order to tell the remaining prisoners about the illusion of reality which they are subject to.¹⁹⁹ He is finally killed by the others, who cannot believe what he tells them. They cannot handle this breach with what they hold to be true reality. This dynamic movement between the illusions of the cave on the one hand, and clear vision in the light of the sun on the other, is the essence of the parable. From this point of view, Tallis can be read as the man who descends from the outside, as a potential bearer of news about the true and the good. However, this image is not completed, which causes a discontinuity with the otherwise unambiguous metaphor. First of all, Tallis and Morgan do not interact. He does not even see her. What he represents is thus still elusive to her. Tallis, the good, is still out of her reach. Secondly, she cannot tell if it is Tallis she sees, or if it is only someone who resembles him. Morgan does not have “clear vision”. What is true and good is not within her reach. Good is difficult to recognize. What is appearance, what is reality? Later, she learns from Peter that it could not have been Tallis. Yet, the apparition (or whatever he is), is an indication that she is closer to reality and clear vision than she has been. She would not have killed him, like the cave-dwellers did with the descending man. She somehow recognises Tallis as her saviour, but she cannot reach him. This extension to the parable of the cave indicates that the novel is not a straightforward re-telling of Plato’s myth.

The second image is (Tallis as) Christ descending into death, to hell. That he descends on the right hand escalator, indicates that he comes from the right hand side of God, the place of the Son. The atmosphere is described as “unreal”. The air is hot, and there is a mirage-like nightmarish (hellish) atmosphere. It is significant that Morgan sees Tallis “separate” from this mirage, and become “form”. She does not see him to begin with. He suddenly materialises. Parallel to the Incarnation, good (God) becomes a recognisable form for the human soul. However, again the problem is the question of whether or not this actually is Tallis, or if it is an apparition. Tallis as Christ is thus not an absolute transfiguration. This is the ambiguity of the sameness/difference-motif, which I have identified in several places in the analysis. Tallis is and is not Christ.

In addition to the references to Plato and the Christian story, there are two further symbols worth mentioning. First, Tallis does not seem to *see* Morgan, just as the “anxious vague eyes” in the Underground do not see her. Morgan realises that *she* must see *him* in order for him to

¹⁹⁹ Plato: “The Republic”, (Book VII), p.312.

save her: "I must follow Tallis. I must see Tallis, I must see him at once. She pushed her way across to the descending escalator." (FHD:329) That Morgan is seen by no-one is significant. Utterly alone and unseen, she has become nothing. This is her hell, her symbolic experience of death. The second symbol is the lighting in the cave. This is referred to several times as being unnatural. The Underground is "hazy". The light is at one point described as "a humming electrical silence". Somewhere else the light "shimmered and shook". Twice earlier, the point has been made that electric lighting is better than no light, but nevertheless far from the sun. Electric light can therefore be interpreted as an indication that a character is a little closer to the truth than before. Electric light is parallel to the artificial light from the fire in the cave, which only produces unclear shadows.

A change in the spatial (visual) aspect of the passage occurs. Until now, the story in this chapter has taken place in a small area of the Underground station. From now on, Morgan moves through a larger area. The perspective widens and the symbolic scope expands. It no longer revolves around her own, personal story, but becomes more universal. Morgan runs after Tallis, but she cannot find him. She tries to think where he would go to get home, and rushes after him. She then has a terrible journey, literally through the "underworld". The Underground is crowded and smelly. She feels sick, frightened and dreadful. Finally, she arrives at the right station, and again, the images are hellish, and reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*:

The station was very strange, it was dark, unless the darkness was only in her eyes. The huge cast iron vaults were not glowing with light, they were obscure and yellow as if filled with steamy mist, and below them it was dim and murky as a winter afternoon although the air was hot. (...) She fled up a long flight of steps and down another and come out under the sky which was misty and sulphurous and overcast. (...) She ran along one shabby street, paused, and then ran down another. She panted along between houses which were stripped and wrenched and torn, where people sat silently on doorsteps and waited. The horror, the horror of the world. (FHD:330-1)

Although she has now left the Underground, the atmosphere outside is hellish. The external atmosphere is a reflection of her inner world. The internal aspects of the scenes under ground, are extended after she physically comes out into open air. She is still in her personal hell, but she now represents something larger than herself, namely humanity. The description of the outside, in particular when she runs down shabby streets with waiting strangers sitting on doorsteps, is like a nightmare. Her inner experience of the horror of the world is transported onto the external world, something she herself reflects upon when she wonders whether the "darkness was only in her eyes", or if it was a "reality".

Finally, Morgan arrives at Tallis's house. She bursts in, and finds Peter there. She asks for Tallis. Peter tells her that he is away. When she says that she saw him on the Underground, Peter says that she couldn't have, because Tallis would have taken the bus where he was going. The question of whether or not it was Tallis she saw, remains unresolved. There is no clue as to whether what Morgan saw was real or not. Much of this chapter is permeated by an uncertainty as to what is subjective to Morgan, and what is objective. Peter is glad to see her. He seems frightened as well. The inner and outer realities of Morgan's surroundings merge to a certain extent when Peter too comments on the light. He sees it as being "like the end of the world".

'I'm so glad you've come. This light is so weird, isn't it. Like the end of the world. I was feeling quite odd. Why, you're out of breath and – what's the matter?'

'Nothing.' There was a flicker of lightning, electrical and sharp, felt rather than seen. Then after a moment or two a long drum roll of distant thunder. (FHD:331)

The strange light and atmosphere do not only exist in Morgan's mind. At the same time, however, they still reflect her inner state. The storm is the first bad weather in the novel. Until now it has been very hot, with strong sunshine. However, the heat has varied between being unnatural (at times hellish), and paradisiac (as it was in the very beginning). The storm signals danger, yet it has cleansing powers. It is still hot. The use of weather is a very traditional Murdochian technique. Weather is often a symbol of inner tension/release. Morgan tries to explain to Peter what she has been through. Her description is incoherent, but it suddenly brings a new dimension into the situation. The chapter ends with the following passage:

'(...) Morgan, you're looking so strange, what is it? Morgan, darling –'

'I've lost my handbag.'

'Oh, I'm so sorry!' Peter had pulled another chair up beside her.

'And there was a pigeon – in Piccadilly Circus station – at the bottom of the escalator – I tried to catch it –'

The child, thought Morgan, the child might have existed. It would have been a few months old. It might have been the solution to everything. Why has she not understood what a terrible thing it was to deprive that child of life? She had killed it so casually and drunk half a bottle of Bourbon afterwards.

'The child – ' The horror or the world.

'Morgan, are you feeling all right?'

The thunder was nearer, more explosive, cracking down upon London. A few huge drops of rain fell, hitting the houses, clattering like pebbles onto roofs and windows. A sudden coolness began to sway through the heavy yellow air.

It was dark in the kitchen. Peter pulled his chair closer still and began to try to take Morgan in his arms. She pushed him roughly away and rose to her feet.

'Don't touch me!'

'Don't look at me like that, Morgan!'

'Leave me alone.'

The rain was beginning to spill down like water from a tilted bucket. A huge flash lit up the kitchen for a moment with a cold pallid silvery light, showing Morgan's staring eyes and Peter's scared unhappy face. Then the rain itself darkened the scene falling like a dense curtain of grey clangorous metal.

Morgan's figure merged into the darkness of the doorway and another flash of lightning showed the luminous lines of rain curtaining the street door. Then she was gone, running, fading, dissolving, instantly vanishing into the thick grey substance of the roaring downpour. (FHD:332-3)

Significantly, Morgan for the first time feels true remorse for the abortion. This is a shocking realization for her. It is important that her guilt for once concerns someone other than herself. She sees her past actions as being consequential for other people's lives. In this case, she realises that her actions have even deprived someone of its life. However, her mind still revolves around herself. Her idea that the child would have been "the solution to everything", is from the perspective of her own messy life which she needs to make sense of. Nevertheless, she sees that the horror of the world extends beyond her own horror. She identifies with something larger than herself, and although this is a negative and painful experience for her, she transcends the solipsistic world view she has been living within.

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This is an important turning point in Morgan's narrative, or at least, what appears to be a turning point. One of the significant changes concerns how she relates to other people. When confused and in trouble, she invariably turns to Hilda or one of the men for affirmation. She has been dependent on them for validation of her ego, and thus to a certain extent has used them for her own consolation when she fears her lack of selfhood. Her rejection of Peter's touch it is an indication that she has changed: she does not turn to sexual or emotional validation. This does not mean that she has become "perfect" in any way, but that an important milestone in her story has been reached. The ideal for Morgan, the "light outside the cave" is *true* intimacy, not "low Eros". What Morgan needs is a relationship where she sees the other *as other*. This she can only achieve by the death of the ego, through a process of unselfing. This chapter has shown the pain of Morgan's moral process toward true selfhood through her symbolic death/unselfing.

The significance of this climax in her psychological development during this chapter, is accentuated by the breaking of the weather. The onset of thunder and lightning mark this dramatic turning point. The oppressive heat, which has been part of the whole novel so far, is released by a "sudden coolness". The hot sun is relieved by rain, and the cathartic effect of this is powerful. Finally, in the very last scene, Morgan rushes out into the "clangorous

metal” sheet of rain. There, she dissolves, vanishes, and merges into the darkness. This is a powerful symbol of the death of her ego. Morgan has reached rock bottom. It is an important step in her moral development.

c) Julius’s Power is Challenged (Chapter 14)

While Chapter 10 had the climax of Morgan’s story as its thematic centre, this chapter has been selected because of key turning-points in both Julius’s and Simon’s stories. Some time later (maybe weeks), Simon, Axel, Peter and Julius are at yet another of Hilda and Rupert’s parties. They are holding a dinner party to celebrate the completion of Rupert’s book on moral philosophy. Morgan has decided not to come, and there is no mention of Tallis. This is the last of the novel’s three significant parties and gatherings in this garden. The narrative focal point throughout the chapter is Simon’s.

*

The characters are all in evening dress, drinking champagne. The chatter flows easily. At first glance, it appears to recall the happy and uncomplicated paradisiac atmosphere from the novel’s opening chapters. An important clue to the real disharmony which lies just under the surface at the party is given when Simon looks at the others, and thinks to himself: “What a remarkable talent the English people have for hiding their feelings.” (FHD:367) He observes rightly that here is only a thin veneer of happiness, whereas in fact the atmosphere below the apparent surface is extremely tense and about to erupt.

Simon is swimming in the pool, observing the others. Axel calls him a “water-baby”, which is an ironic but yet relevant reference to his innocence. Simon both is and is not an innocent in this story. Much of the passage consists of Simon’s reflections on his relationship with Axel (as usual), which has become very strange and uncomfortable due to the accumulation of secrets and lack of true communication. He is desperate to confess all to Axel, but worries that he “would either be not believed or not forgiven.” (FHD:368) Both alternatives are difficult for him to face. He also desperately wants to ask Julius what exactly is going on between Rupert and Morgan, but does not want to approach him directly. The reason he does not do this is that he feels enslaved by Julius’s willpower, and is utterly powerless in confrontation with him. Simon has repeatedly experienced that “Julius had this extraordinary power of making him do things.” (FHD:369). Simon is frustrated. He knows that something is wrong in the atmosphere, and he does, in fact, know more about what is going on than many of the others do. Yet, he cannot quite grasp what the full truth of the stories around him actually is. He also

worries that if he had known, he would nevertheless have lacked the power to do anything about it.

Hilda calls the guests in for dinner. When Simon attempts to get out of the pool, his powerlessness is illustrated directly: Julius tries to prevent him climbing out of the water. He keeps pushing Simon back in again. Julius says, "You are my prisoner, little one." (FHD:372) Simon does not give up, though, and keeps trying to get out. Before Julius finally lets him out of the pool, he forces Simon to say that he will not tell Axel anything. Simon is imprisoned by Julius in the sense that the secrets and lies are still to be kept. This is one of the few times in the whole novel where Julius comes across as being directly malicious and frightening. He appears to be threatened by Simon, and is no longer elegantly manipulative. He has changed into a violent bully. It seems as if he realises that Simon can ruin it all for him by telling the truth, and that he desperately needs to prove his power by making sure that he doesn't. Julius's façade is beginning to crack. This is crucial to what happens next. For when at last Simon manages to get out, a very important event occurs: Simon turns the balance of power by pushing Julius into the deep end of the pool. Hilda, Rupert and Axel see this, and are livid with Simon for doing it, not knowing the background. They still see Julius as the glamorous and glittering person he presents himself as, and they all still have respect for him. Simon, however, is a silly and spoilt person in their eyes. To them his childlikeness is not innocent, but infantile. With reference to Plato's myth, it would seem that their misunderstanding of the situation is an indication that they are still caught in the illusion which Simon has partially escaped, although he is not yet "out of the cave". It turns out that Julius cannot swim. As mentioned earlier, Conradi has pointed out the typical Murdochian symbolism of swimming. Devils cannot swim, and to be able to swim is to possess moral competence. That Simon is a "water-baby" and loves to swim, is a further indication of Simon's moral development.

The following scene is of great symbolic value, as Julius's "true nature" emerges in the water:

The pool surged and boiled, suddenly filled by an immense bulk of struggling blackness. The water tilted and leapt up. Julius' limbs were everywhere. A dark sleeved arm lifted up and clawed the air. Julius's head seemed to have vanished. It emerged for a brief moment, red-faced, gulping, gasping, the mouth round and open. Julius's tongue showed red, his eyes were visible suddenly like wild sea-eyes in a contorted creature, his arms whirled aimlessly, and his head sank like a great stone. The frenzied water rushed back and closed again above the bulky twisting helpless mass. (FHD:373)

For once Julius is helpless. Without control, he becomes monstrous. In the water, his appearance "dissolves", and it would seem that his true self emerges. This description of Julius is

thus not of a man, but of a mythical creature. Such a creature has powerful intertextual references, particularly poignant in the ancient traditions around *Leviathan*, a whale- or crocodile-like being. The name is derived from a Hebrew root meaning “coil”, or “twist”, which in itself mirrors the image of Julius above. This sea-monster represents Chaos, that from which God creates.²⁰⁰ This is a complex myth with many roots and usages. Significantly, the complexity of the symbolism corresponds with many of the ambiguous aspects of Julius, and bring to the foreground the difficulties of performing simplistic readings of this character.²⁰¹

Simon, in a magnanimous act of compassion, tries to help Julius out of the water. However, he is dragged back into the pool by Julius, who is by now desperate. He thinks he is going to die. Rupert, Axel and Hilda manage to get Julius out of the water, but no one helps Simon, who has to climb out on his own. At first they believe Julius to be unconscious, but it turns out that he is fine. Rupert is about to take him away to find some dry clothes. Hilda feels faint. Axel is livid. He screams at Simon, and insists on them leaving the party. Before the party breaks up, however, Julius comes over to Simon, and gives a curious comment, which ends the chapter:

Julius’s back was towards the others. Simon stepped towards him. Then he thought, he is going to hit me. He began to raise his arm to protect himself. Then he saw Julius’s eyes glowing at him. His hand was seized, lifted, and he felt the warmth of Julius’s lips upon his cold fingers. Julius muttered something. It sounded like ‘Well done!’.
(FHD:375)

This passage corresponds with an alternative interpretation of the novel which I shall return to later, in which Simon is the victor, the one who defeats Julius (who is the one to be “honourably defeated”). There is a clear reference to a relational unity between them, in that Julius is turned away from the others and faces Simon, who steps towards him. This is a symbol of compassion, and although Simon is still frightened, he realises that things have changed between them when Julius (seemingly) acknowledges his courage.

d) Lies Unravelling (Chapters 15-18)

The four chapters towards the end of the novel form a unity, in that they all clearly involve transitions *from appearance to reality*. Several levels of truth gradually become clear. The plot unravels, and Julius is finally exposed as a fraudster. The characters stop lying to each other, and they come to understand more about themselves and their relationships. Illusions

²⁰⁰ Northrop Frye provides an excellent discussion of the Leviathan-motif in literature. See Frye: *The Great Code*, p.187ff.

²⁰¹ See a longer discussion of this image in Part V, in the chapter about Julius.

are exposed, secrets are told, and Julius's power is thus reduced. However, the damage is already done and will not be redeemed. The focus in the analysis of these chapters, is to study aspects and implications of this gradual change from falsity to truth. Several of the minor characters come into play in this chapter, in particular Hilda and Rupert.

Chapter 15

Julius is changing his clothes after having fallen into the pool. This indicates that the incident has been a turning point in Julius's story. Hilda is also changing her clothes. At this point of the narrative, she too is at a point of crisis. She has taken off her wet dress, which brings to mind the shed skin of a snake: "the green silk dress (...) lay damp and twisted across the back of a chair." (FHD:376). She is only wearing a white lacy petticoat. This could symbolize that behind veils of falsehood there is innocence, here signified by the clean white lace. The state of partial undress is also an image of vulnerability. In the case of Julius, he emerges a little later wearing Rupert's dark blue silk dressing gown. He has covered himself, which is an inversion of the image of Hilda in her petticoat. He is in the drawing room drinking whisky, which is something he rarely does. This indicates that he is shattered, and needs to regain some of the control he has lost. There are few indications of Julius trying to conceal vulnerability or lack of power. Earlier, the power almost invariably seems to be inherent in him. This is slightly different now, although he does not by any means appear to have become powerless.

Hilda has locked the door to her bedroom. Rupert implores her to let him in. She tells Rupert that she knows about him and Morgan. He attempts to deny it, but the truth is emerging. Rupert tells her that there is no love-affair, and that he will explain everything. He says that he just wanted to help Morgan because he cares for her. He still deludes himself, explaining, and believing, that Morgan fell in love with him. Hilda does not believe him. She tells him that he has killed her by involving himself with Morgan. The words are strong. Hilda's belief that her marriage has been a good one is ruined. Her consolation has disintegrated. The reference to death, i.e. being killed, is an indication of her coming to terms with true reality, thus penetrating the veil of illusion of the goodness of the relationships in her life. Two of the people closest to her have betrayed her. Her former happy and comfortable life has changed fundamentally. This is, as mentioned, a turning point in her story. Her symbolic death brings a slightly different Hilda into being. She will finally emerge stronger, but at a high cost. Hilda could have handled Rupert having an affair with anyone else than Morgan, she says. She will, however, not let him explain himself further, and tells him.

There is nothing you can say. The facts say it all. You can't *explain* something like this. You have this pathetic belief in words. But words can't console me or make whole again what you've irrevocably spoilt and broken. (FHD:377)

This is a powerful reference to the essence of Rupert's problem, namely that his words and deeds do not coincide. Hilda's use of the words "spoilt and broken" are significant. He speaks about love, but does not behave accordingly. He talks about the value of his marriage, but lets it disintegrate by betraying his wife. The idealism which possesses his mind, and which he writes loftily about, is not reflected in his actions. Mind and body are in dissonance. An important aspect of this in relation to the subject of this thesis concerns the authority by which Rupert speaks. His words are imposed on, not attuned to, the situation. The connection between, or dynamic relation of, consciousness and action is not active. Thus Rupert's words have a false ring to them. Exposed as such, he loses his status as the good, idealistic man which he was presented as from the beginning. His character, as well as his life, is fragmented, not integrated. Without such integrity, Rupert has no authority.

In her room, Hilda turns to the mirror, not for the first time. At important stages of her story, the reader has only indirect access to her. Hilda remains an enigmatic character throughout the novel. From the beginning and all through the story, the other characters' opinions of her vary a great deal. Some see her as wise (Axel, Morgan and to a degree Julius). The narrator often portrays her as being slightly silly and "nice", although sometimes catty and spiteful. Neither Peter nor Simon seem to have much respect for her, whereas Rupert does in words although not in deeds. All in all, she is a complex person. However, precisely because of this elusiveness and complexity, she comes across as being a credible character. The scenes with her in front of mirrors can work as reminders of the difficulty of surpassing what appears to be the reality of another person. In addition to this, it is important to note that mirrors have a double significance. On the one hand, they provide representations of reality, not "the real thing". At the same time, they illustrate self-observation which is not available otherwise. The mirror-scenes are thus also important as comments on art, and the complexity of the relationship between reality and its representations.

Hilda tells Rupert that Julius knows about the affair, and that apparently all the others do as well. He cannot understand it. Neither of them knows anything at all about the web of lies they are caught in. They are both victims, but it is Rupert who could have handled the manipulation differently and thus altered the situation. He tries to avoid the blame, by telling Hilda that she must not break up the marriage, whereupon Hilda rightly points out that it is his

actions which have lead to the destruction, not hers. He still refuses to acknowledge responsibility, and refers to some idea of fate, to being caught by the automacy of a machine in the face of which he has no choice. Hilda commands him to leave. She wants to be alone. Rupert goes, and finds Julius in the dining room. It has become dark outside. The garden is “full of dark brown sombre light.” (FHD:380), which echoes the sombre atmosphere of the chapter. The darkness also implies that it is difficult to see clearly. Rupert confronts Julius:

‘Did you tell Hilda I was having a love affair with Morgan?’ said Rupert.

‘No,’ said Julius. ‘I know there’s a rumour to this effect. I told Hilda not to pay too much attention to it.’

Rupert stared at Julius’s blurred face and at his big shadow on the wall. He said, ‘Something insane has happened.’ (FHD:380-1)

It is interesting to notice Julius’s blurred face, because it seems that he is becoming less real. The contours of his presence almost dissolve. In addition, his shadow is big, which could indicate that evil and the unconscious are strongly present. It would seem that Julius represents what Rupert has been ignoring, i.e. the shadow side of life. Rupert’s world view, his life and philosophy, lacks integration between ideals and the reality of evil. This is the core of the problem of his optimistic idealism, which causes his downfall. Julius tells Rupert that his marriage has been an illusion, and that what has happened will go over. The impression Julius gives of certainty about the future is interesting. As the otherworldly being he has been portrayed as, it is easy to believe that Julius knows, almost prophetically, how the story will end. However, this does not come about, and Julius’s authority is thus also reduced. Thus, the human and fallible Julius comes more strongly into play towards the end. Julius also says that Rupert and Hilda will resume their life together with a little more realism. His goal in conversations and actions often seems to be this idea of bringing the others to a different view of reality.

Julius’s anthropology is negative, and reflects much of Murdoch’s pessimistic anthropology: “Human life is a jumbled ramshackle business at best and you really must stop aspiring to be perfect, Rupert, especially after this latest piece of evidence.” (FHD:382) Against Julius, though, Murdoch would hold that one must never stop aspiring to be perfect, however impossible such a task is. Julius tells Rupert to let go of his ideals, and to accept a more realistic view of the world. Rupert will not be a cynic, but Julius says it is not cynicism, but “a sensible acceptance of the second-rate.” (FHD:382) Rupert says that he cannot live without his love and marriage. Julius replies: “A mirage, my dear fellow. Better the real world, however shabby, than the condition of high-minded illusion.” (FHD:383) This comment is intensified

by what happens next. Julius tells Rupert that Peter has wrecked his book. He says that he had come across him in the study and tried to reason with him. However, he continues to say:

Then in the end I helped him. (...) Perhaps it was silly of me. But I could see that he was determined to finish the job, so I thought I might as well tear up one or two notebooks too. Besides, to be perfectly frank, Rupert, I don't think it was a very good book. I don't just mean that it wasn't true, it wasn't even particularly clever, at least not anything like clever enough for its pretensions. You haven't got that kind of mind. It wouldn't have done your reputation any good. (FHD:384)

Rupert is devastated. He tells Julius to leave. This is the first time Rupert is angry with Julius, or even at all suspicious of him. Julius points out that the book was neither true nor good nor clever. His goodness, both in life and work, is naïve. This scene is an important key to understanding Rupert's story. That Rupert himself has become a fragmented person, which was suggested above, is confirmed symbolically in that his book is now literally in fragments. Rupert and his book merge. The torn book, its disintegration and ruin, is also a warning of what will shortly happen to Rupert himself. He desperately hopes that Hilda will talk to him, but realises that something is irrevocably lost to him: "There was something which had vanished away out of the world forever." (FHD:384) His story is one of disintegration, from the *appearance* of being whole and integrated, to the emergence of the *reality* of his shatteredness and the falseness of his illusions. There is no redemption for him, as he will not face his own responsibility in the situation, or acknowledge the state of illusion he has been bound by. The ultimate consequence of Rupert's story must be his death. The something that has "vanished from the world forever", is his self, his character.

Chapter 16

Morgan, who wasn't present at the Foster's garden party, is at home. She has received a long letter from Hilda in which it becomes clear to Morgan that Hilda knows about the affair. The secret has come to the surface. Rupert and Morgan realise this at the same time. After reading the letter, she tears it up, and thinks: "What a long distance lies between an act and its consequences. How *could* her dreamy converse with Rupert have occasioned, have *caused*, this terrible violence? It was like the humming of a song causing an aeroplane crash." (FHD:385) Morgan sees things as happening to her, without her own involvement. She does not see herself as part of the intricacies of human relationships, in which acts *do* have consequences. She is therefore surprised that her act of betrayal could cause such hurt. Her reflections on the distance between an act and its consequences are symptomatic of Morgan's misconstruction of her reality. She does not take responsibility for her part in the act, nor does she see what has

happened as quite “real”, referring to it as a “dreamy converse”. In doing this, she distances herself from her involvement in what actually was a real betrayal. She sees Rupert as the one responsible and herself no more than a helper of good will. She is worried that the deep sisterly bond between herself and Hilda will be broken, but seems to worry more for her own sake than for Hilda’s. She also suddenly feels contempt for Rupert and sees him as a weak man, for which she despises him. She reflects on the change in her view of him:

I believe I was simply impressed by his own self-satisfaction, she thought. Some people are like that. They are so profoundly pleased with themselves that they mesmerize others into admiring them. Perhaps in Rupert’s case it had something to do with his theories. (...) Rupert imagined that he knew all about goodness. He imagined that it was permitted to him to love and do as he liked. But what was he in reality? A hedonistic civil servant, an easy-going member of the establishment, with a marvellous wife and a lucky disposition. Well, his luck had abandoned him this time. (FHD:386)

There are several insights into Rupert’s nature in Morgan’s reflection. She connects his attractiveness to his theories, which now becomes disrupted when she tries to see him for what he is in reality. In this, she identifies an aspect of the problem of appearance versus reality, which is the thematic heart of this novel. This is followed soon after by a moment of self-awareness. Here, the contrast between the apparent Morgan (she sees her own face as a mask) and the reality of the “obscure bases” of her (unconscious) life is indirectly identified:

Morgan sat there stiff, with her eyes half closed, leaning forward, and her face became hard and strange to her like a mask and she felt the deep obscure bases of her life shuddering and stirring. I have not known who I am, she thought. But I will know. (FHD:387)

Both passages above indicate that although Morgan has a long way to go to reach a degree of moral maturity by seeing beyond herself to the other, she is on the way. This is, however, not the first time Morgan is convinced that she has reached insight into who she is, and also believed the consequential change in her to be immanent. Morgan’s story illustrates the difficulty of change, and not least the fallibility and slowness of moral growth. It is one thing to understand what is needed, or to experience dramatic episodes which there and then seem to have life-changing qualities. It is another to actually implement such changes in the depth of the character. In the scene with Morgan in the Underground and those surrounding it, a real change did happen in Morgan’s story. The death-imagery and the identification with something other than herself were important narrative devices in the construction of her story. It was certainly the symbolic turning-point. However, that experience has little impact in her story, and provided only a very tiny glimpse of the possibility of true metanoia, or change.

This discontinuity between narrative expectations or possibilities and the “real” story of Morgan illustrates well the frustrations of a human being’s attempts to change her character and the long distance between theory and real life experience. This distance, and the attempt to overcome it, is partially symbolized by a series of images of fragmentation and efforts to repair the damage. After having torn the letter from Hilda to pieces, Morgan tries to reconstruct it. She picks up the pieces from the waste paper basket, only to find in it fragments of an unread letter from Tallis which she had discarded earlier. The shreds of letters from two people close to her are jumbled together. But she can tell who is who by the handwriting. The torn and almost unintelligible bits of paper are an important symbol of her relationships:

She began to pick up the pieces and let them flutter down again: really remember our life together? was Tallis, even our innocent childhood was Hilda, and by a family bond I mean was Tallis, warned by your casual treatment of was Hilda, to buy you an engagement ring was Tallis, Rupert misled you? Our happiness was Hilda, lot of tommyrot, my darling was Tallis, only this particular treachery was Hilda, position to command not beg was Tallis, vulgar deceptions and lies was Hilda, unharmed and bright was Tallis, blackened and destroyed was Hilda, always always was Tallis, never never was Hilda. (FHD:387)

This passage shows the muddle Morgan finds herself in. She cannot understand her life. Her relationships are fragmented and unreadable to her. From one point of view, the letters she has torn up represent her acts of alienation from both Tallis and Hilda. She now needs to make sense of the fragments. At the end of the chapter, Morgan writes a letter to Rupert, letting him know that she will have no more to do with him, and that she reproaches him for having started the relationship. Here, her channelling of responsibility away from herself is clearly stated. She writes only a short note to Hilda, saying: “Darling, hang on. We shall not be divided.” (FHD:389)

It is ethically significant that Morgan must face the true realities of her actions. After the lies are uncovered, she must handle the consequences. It is crucial that she does not actually handle these well. Although there are glimpses of her truly facing reality, she is nevertheless bound by her consoling construction of reality. She will not face the fact that her bond with Hilda might have been broken, or that the situation she finds herself in is one for which she must take some responsibility. Although the “affair” between her and Rupert was staged, or puppet-mastered by Julius (a fact which Morgan does not yet know), what actually happened, and the words said between the two, *were* real actions.

Chapter 17

In the third chapter in the quadruplet of scenes in which “the truth” emerges, Axel and Simon are sitting in the car on the way home from the botched dinner party. Simon is distraught, and Axel is silent. Simon decides to tell him everything, hoping that Axel will realise that it is the whole truth. He tells all, from the episode with Morgan at Julius’s flat, to the “puppet show” in the museum. He explains that Julius has had a mysterious power over him, and how he has been manipulated. Axel asks for clarification every now and then, and Simon explains everything. He is extremely nervous. Axel believes him. They talk about what has happened, and end up admitting that they had both been stupid, but it was because they were so miserable. They decide not to talk to Julius, but to wait and see what happens to Rupert and Morgan. Axel does not want to interfere, in case they raise a false alarm.

This is yet another example of Simon’s observer-mode, which has several times turned out to be destructive for him. This time they both take this stance. Although this is never actually stated, it seems likely that Rupert’s death could have been prevented if they had taken action at this stage. Thus, their role in the crisis is significant, even if it is a passive position. This brings the theme of power versus submission into play again. Submission, or passivity, can also be a way of exerting power. This point stresses the ambivalence of moral situations, or ways of handling them. It illustrates that the negative relating to others, by way of both aggressive and passive power, is a result of not actually seeing the true needs of the other.

Chapter 18

Whereas the three preceding chapters take place simultaneously, the final chapter of the group of scenes in which there is a marked shift from appearance to reality takes place a little later. Julius has come to visit Tallis. They are in the kitchen. It is cold. A ray of light is coming in from the window.

A watery ray had even managed to find its way between two walls to cast a triangle of clarity upon the wooden draining board, showing the ragged rotting wood at the end and the green filaments of the mould which had covered the contents of a white porcelain bowl. (FHD:399)

The light has a triangular shape. This can be interpreted as a reference to the Trinitarian imagery connected to the three men in Notting Hill. However, this ray sheds light upon the dirt and mould of the kitchen. It could therefore allude to the pervertedness of this Trinity. This interpretation is ambiguous. (Compare my earlier point that the messiness of Tallis’s house

represents "true reality" and is a symbol of good, not its opposite.) However, this is a typical example of the obscurity of Murdochian symbolism, which is often deeply ambivalent.

Julius tells Tallis about Rupert and Morgan, and the truth of the plot is unmasked. That is, if the reader can trust Julius's words, which I believe is possible at this stage. He confesses (without remorse) to his intervention in the Fosters' marriage. Tallis is shocked. Julius explains that he had used Morgan's love letters to himself, and sent them to Rupert. He also found and stole Rupert's old letters to Hilda, and sent them to Morgan. In these letters they thus both profess their love, but to someone else. Julius explains that the idea had occurred to him once when he had been prowling around in Priory Grove wanting to see if Hilda had some sort of secret life. This had been for fun. He had found a secret compartment in her desk, and discovered letters from Rupert. Julius seems to think that it is pathetic that Hilda's secret life is with her husband. After he had found these letters, he had gone to Rupert's study where they had talked about his book. The goodness that Rupert has been writing about had irritated Julius, and he confesses to Tallis: "I couldn't help wondering how old Rupert would stand up to a real test and what all this high-minded muck would really amount to in practice." (FHD:403) This was the concrete background for using Rupert for the experiment. In Morgan's case, it was his annoyance at her "remarkable capacity for making false images of people and then persecuting people with these images." (FHD:403) Julius's view of the whole business is that his part in it all was in fact very small:

There's hardly any deception, if you chose it carefully enough, which people will not co-operate. Egoism moves them, fear moves them, and off they go. (...) Mix up pity and vanity and novelty in an emotional person and you at once produce something very much like love. (FHD:405-6)

Hilda became involved because Julius was curious about her reaction. He had no intention of hurting her, and was surprised that she was so easily fooled. He admits that this was not as much fun for him. He had total control over her, and manipulated her strongly. However, he is amazed at how predictable they all have been, and his following statement is important: "They really are puppets, *puppets*." (FHD:408) The theatrical image is back in play, with Julius as the grand master of the whole thematic structure of role-playing and staging of other people. He is, however, not the only one to manipulate others in a "show". Remember that his primary annoyance with Morgan concerns her tendency to stage all her relationships by pursuing false images.

Tallis remains silent while listening. Towards the end of the narrative, Julius tells Tallis that he is now rather bored, and that he does not quite know what to do next. Boredom was the reason he gave up his project developing biological weapons, and indicates a lack of attentiveness and interest in what he occupies himself with. He wants to be amused, but his pleasure is shallow. Tallis then rises to the occasion. He insists that they tell Hilda about the deception at once. The chapter ends with Julius and Tallis going off to find a phone box in order to phone Hilda. This is important, as Tallis is the only character who actually initiates a right action in the situation. It is the honourable thing to do, and although it turns out that his actions come too late, he nevertheless does what is possible to redeem the situation and the people involved. The scene could imply that Tallis wins the battle. However, evil does win. The story enters a phase of death and destruction.

e) The Climax: Death and Disintegration (Chapters 19-20)

The following two chapters are selected for close reading, because they contain the novel's climax, and are thus important to the narrative structure. I have chosen to discuss some of the major symbolism with reference to the whole novel, thus somewhat expanding the scope for the close reading.

Chapter 19

Hilda has escaped London in her distress and is at the family cottage in Wales. She is lonely and miserable. It is raining heavily, which stresses the fact that the tension has broken, and that the dramatic climax of the story is approaching. Hilda reflects that "[t]he only person she felt in any way inclined to see was Julius, him she even at moments craved to see, but it was an odd craving, as if for something unreal." (FHD:411) Several times throughout the novel, both Julius and Tallis have been described as being "unreal", which indicates a parallelism between them. It is also significant that this sense of unreality always occurs in relation to others. For instance, in a discussion of the relationship between Peter and Tallis, I developed the point that Tallis's problem at that stage was that he did not truly interact in relationships. He was symbolically represented as a form of nothingness, and thus did not actually pose as *other* in relation to Peter. Tallis vaguely realises this, and reflects that the way out of despair, towards "salvation", might be through interaction with other people. Tallis too, throughout the story, has gradually become more real. This was particularly clear in the scene in which he fights in the Chinese restaurant, in a physical engagement with others.

In the case of Julius, his story seems to move in the opposite direction, as there are indications of a movement *from* being *to* nothingness. This was mentioned in relation to the Leviathan-imagery. I suggested that Julius is represented as chaos/nothingness/evil. (This will be discussed further in Part V) His being is an appearance. What seems to be a reality partially disintegrates in the water. This also happened when his face was blurred in Rupert's office. However, aspects of Julius's unreality also occur earlier in the story, in particular in relation to Morgan. When she earlier visited him in his flat, she said: "Your absence has clung to my side like an animal devouring my entrails" (FHD:142). Thus, while Julius is conceived of as having a strong presence in relation to the majority of the characters throughout most of the narrative, it is already at this early stage precisely the sense of absence which captivates Morgan. This fascination enables her to retain her grandiose fantasy that she is a suffering lover.

When Hilda in the present passage thinks of Julius as unreal, she feels uncomfortable. She intuitively senses his unreality as a threat, as "an odd craving". This is an indication that she, in contrast to Morgan, is uneasy about Julius and his role in her life. At this point she does not yet know that he is behind the wreckage of her marriage, nor what will be the full extent of his evil infiltration in her life. But then the telephone rings. It is Julius, who tells her all about the trick he has played on them all. He tells her: "I was the magician." (FHD:414) As mentioned earlier, many of Murdoch's novels have a character who in some way or another functions as a magician. Sometimes, such as here, this is very explicit. The recurring "tricksters" serve as illustrations of the randomness and unpredictability of human life. They break the patterns of healthy and happy human relationships by their deliberate, often demonic and evil, actions. They disrupt trust and break bonds between other characters. Julius tells Hilda how all the happenings had been a practical joke which got out of hand, and explains to her the details. His final analysis of it all is this: "You have all three been deceived by mere appearances and apparitions." (FHD:415). It is thus the "mere appearances", i.e. the lack of true vision, which has led to the fall from happiness which prevailed in the beginning of the story.

With respect to the Platonic allegory of the cave, Julius is here the one who comes into the cave from the outside in order to tell the cave-dwellers that they are living in an illusion. Thus, Julius could be seen as a positive figure. It is, however, important to remember that it was Tallis who had made him tell Hilda. Tallis is the driving force behind the exposure of the lies, and thus the vehicle of true vision, true reality, and ultimately of true goodness. Although his action happens too late in the story, he represents the possibility of salvation, of moral growth and of seeing reality as it is, in "the light of the good". Hilda agrees to ring to Rupert

and tell him what has happened. However, when she puts down the receiver, she knocks over the telephone. The broken telephone becomes a symbol of the final breakdown of communication in Hilda and Rupert's marriage.

In a second the telephone had been transformed from a natural means of communication, an extension of herself, into a grotesque senseless object, useless and even sinister. (...) What happened inside a telephone when one dialled? It wasn't magic. There must be some way of doing what the dial did. Something had broken. Could she not see what it was and mend it? If only she could get through to the exchange. She put the telephone down on the table and it fell apart, disgorging entrails of pink wire. (FHD:416-7)

The double motif of integration and disintegration runs like a thread throughout the novel. Identities and relationships disintegrate: they become fragmented. Broken objects symbolize the ruin of relationships between the characters: The broken vase in Julius's flat, the torn letters (symbols of the disintegration of Morgan and her relationships), the tearing up of Rupert's book (a symbol of his disintegration), and now the broken telephone. Hilda tries and tries to repair the phone, but the more she attempts, the worse it gets. She is desperate to call Rupert, but cannot. She goes out to the car, in order to phone him from the village. But the batteries are dead, and she has no idea what to do to the motor. So she starts walking from the cottage to the village in the wind and rain. The crisis escalates, both in the story itself and symbolically. Hilda's experience with the phone, the car and the storm provide the narrative, atmospheric and symbolic context for the final crisis in the novel, the ultimate disintegration of life where evil and brokenness wins.

Chapter 20

Morgan has come to Priory Grove to find Hilda. It is ten thirty in the morning, and there seems to be nobody there. In a long passage Morgan reflects over all the choices she has taken in the last years, and realises that she has done many stupid things. "How can one live properly when the beginnings of one's actions seem so inevitable and justified while the ends are so completely unpredictable and unexpected?" (FHD:420) Morgan starts asking open-ended questions. Earlier in the story, her internal monologue is usually full of the opinions she has at a given time. The effect is a deeper sense of truthfulness in Morgan's thought. She accepts that she has put herself into muddles, and does not as readily defend herself by blaming fate, or other people, for her misfortune. She acknowledges the fact that she does not understand life, and in this, she is closer to the truth than ever before.

Morgan wanders about in the empty house, thinking that she might find some clue as to where Hilda is. She finds nothing, but realises that she knows nothing of Hilda's personal life. She has been too preoccupied with herself to care about Hilda. She has asked no questions, and has simply expected Hilda to be interested in her life. Again, a different aspect of Morgan emerges, a real interest in someone other than herself. She has professed love for Hilda earlier, but only from the point of view of what Hilda means to her. Here, for the first time, she truly focuses on Hilda, and realises that she has not seen her sister, only herself. This is of great significance in Morgan's story. It is an acknowledgement of her journey towards moral maturity, however slow and muddled this might be.

Then Morgan looks out of the window:

The swimming pool looked somehow odd. Morgan gripped the window ledge. Something weird and awful was in the pool, seeming to occupy nearly all of it. Something dark, like a huge dangling spider. A great bundle, some immense animal or – Morgan's glass fell to the ground. She ran to the door and fled moaning down the stairs. The French windows of the drawing room had swung open. Morgan reached the edge of the pool. Her legs gave way and she sat down with a whimper. A fully clothed human body was floating in the pool below the surface, arms and legs outspread and dangling. It was a man. It was Rupert. (FHD:423)

To begin with, Morgan cannot see what is in the pool. She only gradually understands. It takes time for her to see the reality of the situation. Rupert's body resembles at first a "huge spider", then an "immense animal". Only in death does Rupert join the world of true humanity. I have already referred to this scene many times during the analysis of the novel. It is the ultimate crisis, the downfall of the idealistic Rupert, the result of evil manipulation, of deceit, vanity and lies.

The phone rings. Hilda has at last managed to call. Morgan cannot bring herself to tell Hilda that Rupert is dead. Is this from cowardice, or is it out of compassion for Hilda? Hilda says that she is on her way home, and that everything is going to be all right. Morgan puts the phone down, and not until now does she truly realise that Rupert is gone. She phones the police. This is the point at which "good" loses the battle. From now on, however, the defeat can nevertheless be seen to be *fairly honourable*.

f) The Aftermath of the Battle (Chapters 21-24)

While there is little action in the first half of the novel, the second half has a high narrative pace. This why I have studied all the chapters from Chapter 14 onwards. They have been treated rather as thematic unities. These units are my constructions, not Murdoch's. These

have illustrated some over-arching structures, and provide a possibility to discuss themes as they develop in the narrative context. The following four chapters consist of the “tidying of threads” after the climax. This section thus forms a parallel construction to the exposition in the beginning. The three sub-themes I identified there are echoed in these final chapters. Firstly, the introduction to the characters is paralleled in the information as to what happens to them all after the disrupting weeks of the story-time. Secondly, there are several concrete references to morality and its future in a world where God has died. Thirdly, several of the symbols are brought into play, and with respect to the Biblical sub-plot I studied in the exposition, it is possible here to identify some references to eschatological aspects in the story.

Chapter 21

Julius is back at Tallis’s house. He is doing the dishes, and has tidied up a great deal for Tallis in the kitchen. Julius is obsessed with tidiness and cleanliness, while Tallis does not notice the dirt and filth. That these are ambiguous symbols is important in this scene, because the strong dichotomy between good and evil is more or less dissolved at this stage. Tallis and Julius seem to be close friends, almost allies. In relation to Tallis, Julius is not manipulative, but genuinely friendly. He also seems to respect Tallis, and listens to his advice.

It is quite some time after Rupert died. The inquest had shown that Rupert died by drowning, but after having taken a great deal of pills and alcohol. It was not thought to be suicide, but an accident. Julius analyses the whole situation while he cleans. Tallis just mumbles monosyllables. Peter is nowhere to be found. Hilda and Morgan live together in Lyme Regis, and the house in Priory Grove is for sale. Julius thinks he might buy it, which Tallis recommends him not to do. He concedes this, but that he even considers it, is nevertheless illustrative of his lack of identification and empathy with the people who have suffered from his actions.

At this time, a very important piece of information is given. Julius tells Tallis about his family background. He was an only child in a rich, Central European Jewish family called Kahn. Tallis sees a tattoo on Julius’s arm, and realises that he had been in a concentration camp during the war. Julius affirms this, and says that he spent the war in Belsen. Having emigrated to England, the family (to the regret of Julius) changed their name to King, and converted to Christianity. This knowledge gives the reader a dramatic sense of a movement from appearance to reality. The true story of Julius’s life emerges, and with it many clues by which to understand Julius and his narrative. Julius has earlier evaded talk about the war, his only comment having been that it was a “cosy” war for him. The use of this adjective is slightly

disturbing when one knows what the actuality of his experience must have been. For what reason has he concealed his background? There is no obvious answer to this. However, the emergence of the truth sets his character in a different light. A number of questions arise. What is the consequence of suffering for the moral agent? What is the relation between tragedy and evil? Is it at all relevant to an interpretation of Julius as a representation of evil in this story that he suffered as a child? Does knowledge about a person's life history affect our judgement of this person? Murdoch discusses the Holocaust several times, both in her philosophical and literary texts, but there is no simple connection between such an experience and evil. In her novel *The Nice and the Good*, the character Willy Kost spent the war in a concentration camp. However, his personality is very different from Julius's. In the case of Willy Kost it is possible to understand his suffering as a "purifying" experience, in the sense that it represents a symbolic death and acceptance of mortality and meaninglessness. The experience is therefore an important factor in his journey towards moral maturity. Such an interpretation is not necessarily relevant in the case of Julius.

Tallis comments that Morgan must have known about Julius's history. Julius replies that she never saw the tattoo, and comments that "Perhaps it is only visible in certain lights". (FHD:430) This is unlikely. According to Murdoch's philosophical framework, a possible interpretation could be that it is only in the light of the good that Julius, and others, can be truly visible to the people around them. This light reveals a much more complex character than the stereotypic "evil" figure which has been prominent throughout most of the novel. There have been glimpses of this ambiguity and complexity at certain points. It is therefore significant that Julius does not show the tattoo to Tallis, but that Tallis notices it himself. It is through Tallis's "loving vision", his attentiveness to Julius, that the story of suffering is revealed which leads to the reader seeing Julius in a different light. The relationship between Tallis and Julius is very different from that of Morgan and Julius. Theirs was not a true relationship in the sense that they actually were attentive to the other. Morgan's love for Julius has been exposed as a fantasy. She did not love him, but loved the grandiose vision of herself in relation to him. She did not truly see him, only what he appeared to be in the light of her own needs.

Tallis responds to Julius's narrative by explaining that his sister did not die of polio or suicide (both have been mentioned as causes of death earlier), but was raped and murdered by a sex-maniac. He never tells people this. It is odd that Tallis and Julius have this conversation at the end of the novel. Tallis seems more relaxed than usual. He is still muddled, but tells Julius

that it would be best for all if he left, preferably to go abroad. Julius decides to give Tallis the money that Morgan had cheated him of. Tallis accepts after a little protesting. Another striking aspect of this scene is the way in which the two men come across as otherworldly figures, yet again. Julius is the most active talker in this scene, Tallis answers mostly with monosyllables, but more or less agrees with Julius:

‘Human beings set each other off so. Put three emotional fairly clever people in a fix and instead of trying quietly to communicate with each other they’ll dream up some piece of communal violence.’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s all egoism of course. They will do the most dreadful things to each other rather than seem to be made a fool of or seem not to be in control of the situation.’

‘Indeed.’

‘And sex – they get so agitated, they crave and muddle so. I must say, it’s always seemed to me a very over-rated phenomenon. Where do these plates go?’

‘In there.’ (FHD:428)

They talk about the human beings as if they themselves do not belong in that category. The two of them use pronouns such as ‘them’ and ‘us’, which creates a distance between the characters present in the kitchen and all the other characters (apart from Leonard). Their comments about the others and the situation represent an omniscient point of view. They know truths about the others which the others have no inkling of themselves.

‘Hilda, for instance, of whom one might have hoped better things. Why did she have to run off like that? They all do of course. She could have stayed and talked and listened. But the hurt pride of the outraged wife had to be satisfied by some sort of violent gesture. She wanted to make the other two feel wretched and then, if they consoled each other, even more guilty. And why when we telephoned was she so keen to tell the other two herself? *She* had to be the good fairy, the one with knowledge and power.’

‘Maybe’

‘And Rupert and Morgan. Of course they were flattered into a state of stupefaction at the start by finding themselves adored. Then they each thought they were so wise and good they could manage the whole situation and change passion into spotless love without in any way endangering their loyalty to Hilda. Then suddenly being found out is ugly, nothing lofty and dignified there. Morgan turns nasty and blames Rupert. Rupert just folds up. He cannot endure the destruction of his self-respect. Rupert didn’t really love goodness. He loved a big imposing good-Rupert image. Rupert didn’t die of drowning, he died of vanity.’ (FHD:428)

In relation to Julius’s analysis of the dynamics of the disaster, it is interesting to note his words of parting. When he leaves, he says: “Good-bye. I suppose in the nature of things we shall meet again. (...) You concede that I am an instrument of justice?” (FHD:431) In his opinion, Morgan, Hilda and Rupert got what they deserved. His final judgement of them in

the passage above is quite accurate, considering their stories throughout the novel. From this point of view, it was him who ultimately was the judge, while Tallis was the (to a certain extent unsuccessful) instrument of Grace. The kitchen scene therefore brings to mind aspects of the earlier reference to the wager between God and Satan in the book of Job. At the end of his ordeal, Job is rewarded, and lives a long, good life with a new family in a new country. It is not clear who transfigures the Job-character in this novel, but it is nevertheless significant that Hilda, Morgan and Peter move to California at the end, and start a new, seemingly happy life there, an eschatological perspective with reference to the Biblical symbolic presence. Simon and Axel too are happily reunited and in the end are seen to have grown as a couple. Does this mean that Julius in effect is an agent of the good? Were his actions in fact evil, or was he an instrument of justice? The chapters at the end of the novel are ambiguous in this sense, as is most of the novel.

Chapter 22

Axel and Simon are in their car, in Europe, on holiday. They talk about what has happened. Simon is feeling very guilty, Axel tries to calm him down. He wants Simon to realise that they did what they thought was best for all.

‘The only person about the place with really sound instincts is Tallis. He led Julius straight to the telephone.’

‘Yes. Tallis was right. He saw how awfully perilous it was.’

‘And we didn’t because we were so damned self-absorbed. We thought the others would manage.’

‘All the same, Axel, I can’t help feeling I’m more to blame than anyone. I simply let Julius enslave me.’

‘Dear boy, I am to blame to. I just didn’t take Julius seriously enough as a possible mischief-maker. Yet I’ve seen him do something like this before. And I did nothing about it then simply because I was flattered at being Julius’s friend.’ (FHD:433)

This is the only couple that survives. They have learned not to conceal the truth. In this respect it is significant that they are the only ones who specifically point out that Tallis was in the right. The conversation they have is touching. They analyse their relationship, and they are both humble and loving towards the other. An interesting image occurs in this passage from the holiday in Greece. Axel and Simon see a church in a village, where:

The church tower reached upwards in crazed irregular lines of arcades and archlets to a slender spire of matching blue slate whose weather-cock had become a blurred spear of gold. In the tympanum above the doorway a very battered Christ wearily opened long arms and huge hands, receiving, judging. (FHD:436)

This is the first mention of a church in the novel. There are several aspects of the description which are of interest. First, the adjectives describing the spire (which points upwards to the sun and the unknown) all give connotations to something which is difficult to grasp: *crazed*, *irregular*, *blurred*. The church spire thus becomes a symbol of their humility facing things they do not understand. Murdoch writes about what she sees as true humility in *The Sovereignty of Good*:

The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are. He sees the pointlessness of virtue and its unique value and the endless extent of its demand. Simone Weil tells us that the exposure of the soul to God condemns the selfish part of it not to suffering but to death. The humble man perceives the distance between suffering and death. And although he is not by definition the good man perhaps he is the kind of man who is most likely of all to become good. (SOG:104)

Simon's story in this novel has been one of the development towards becoming virtuous, or morally mature. His narrative has not been ideal as his is full of faults and bad judgement. However, Simon "is" a self-professed Marsyas: he who is flayed. It is the ultimate symbol of unselfing. There is a stark contrast between Simon and Morgan's responses to Julius and the suffering inflicted upon them. Simon suffers in the novel, but he does not romanticize his suffering like Morgan does. Morgan's suffering enhances her ego by embracing the fantasy of Julius, who in a certain sense "is" nothingness. He is not another human with whom she can have a true relation. Simon symbolically faces death several times. For instance, he goes through a process of unselfing when he faces Julius-Leviathan (death/chaos/nothingness) in the pool. He does not embrace him, but pushes him away, thus truly becoming. When chaos is killed, there is creation. When the ego dies, the true, good self can emerge.

Further, with reference to the preceding chapter's discussion of judgement, the image of Christ becomes ambivalent. Christ is he who both receives and judges, as Tallis/Julius do in the previous chapter. However, the description of Christ as very battered corresponds less to Julius than to Tallis, who in the previous chapter was extremely tired. The words also make sense as a description of one who has lost a battle, but who isn't dead (yet). If the Grecian Christ can be taken to be a representation of Tallis at this stage, it is important to see the parallel in that Christ crucified is a defeated man, which Tallis is in this story. Good Friday is, however, not the final ending to the Biblical story of salvation. Victory is to come. Although Tallis's story is not a simple transfiguration of the story of Christ, and although Murdoch does not regard herself as a Christian, I find the image significant. It is not unreasonable to see the structure of the story of Christ as a fundamental symbol of "becoming good". The structure of

the Christian story is parallel to the Platonic cave-parable, and both the stories of Tallis and Simon are in debt to this model of the journey of life towards virtue. The aspect of a time, the future, a beyond, is a central part of Murdoch's understanding of good. Thus, the spire which points up and beyond, and Christ crucified whose story continues beyond the now, are both symbols of the idea of perfection which is always out of reach, but which indicate a direction. Simon is not good, but is the one most likely to become so. He represents the human possibility of goodness, while Tallis represents the cosmic, or transcendent "idea of good" who makes himself seen in human relationships.

Finally, Simon sits in the garden of the hotel, significantly *facing the sun*. His story has a happy ending, and the conclusion of his particular narrative confirms the right direction of his development throughout the story:

He drank some more wine and raised his face to the dazzle of the sun among the leaves and felt his youth lift him and make him buoyant. He was young and healthy and he loved and was loved. It was impossible for him, as he sat there in the green southern light and waited for Axel, not to feel in his veins the warm anticipation of a new happiness. (FHD:437)

Chapter 23

In the final scene in which Tallis appears, Leonard and Tallis are together in Leonard's room. Leonard is vile as usual, but Tallis is patient. He has not told Leonard that the old man is dying of cancer. Leonard seems to be physically disappearing. He is disintegrating:

Leonard's eyes were brilliant with aggrieved vitality. His face was losing the podgy wrinkled look and was gaunter, paler, transparent, the skin pulled and smoothed and yellow, the nose sharper. The tonsured bush of silver hair was flatter, thinner." (FHD:440)

It is particularly important that he is described as becoming *transparent*. Leonard is becoming invisible, even before his final death. This is interesting, because he himself can see, with "brilliant vital eyes". This relates to the possible identification of Leonard as a representation of the God-head. He can see, but cannot be seen. An interpretation of this could be that although it is possible that God exists, God is nevertheless not relevant in the secular world in which these characters belong. What seems to be the case, is that although God might see (and thus have being), there is no true relationship between God and humanity if no-one can see God. In addition to this, the portrayal of God is not that of one who sees the other (in this case Tallis) with compassionate attention. Leonard is bitter and abusive towards his son. There is a sense in which one as a reader hopes for Tallis's sake that his father dies and re-

leases him from torment. Nevertheless, Tallis weeps over his father: “And he thought, how can I endure my dear father’s death, how can I live through his dying?” (FHD:445) Tallis in this final portrayal of him is depressed. He *is* a battered, defeated man:

For the rest, he seemed to have nothing left. No experiences, no certainty. Had there ever been certainty? There had been experiences. He remembered something, like a kind of light, nothing with form. Perhaps that had been a dream too. He never knelt down now, the act of homage to elsewhere had become impossible, would have seemed obscene. Perhaps it had always been a mucky sexual ritual after all. Any kind of prayer would be superstition now. (FHD:442)

There is an oddness to his inner monologue, a sense in which he is not aware of whom he is. What is the formless light he remembers? Has Tallis returned to the cave, so to speak, and forgotten the sun? He cannot pray, or whatever he did when he paid homage to an unidentifiable “elsewhere”. His father has forsaken him, and he is alone in the underworld.

He grieved blankly over something which seemed, in its disastrous compound of human failure, muddle and sheer chance, so like what it was all like. It went wrong from the start, he said to himself. But these were not his words, and this was not his thought, and he put it away from him as a temptation. (FHD:443)

Here it seems as if he is vaguely aware that he is not human, but part of something bigger. That “all went wrong from the start” were not his, but Leonard’s words. However, he seems to wish not to fall for the temptation to think he is anything other than human. This is in stark contrast to Julius in the coming, final chapter of the novel. In the end, Tallis remains as pathetic and elusive a character as he has always been. However, he has changed throughout the novel in the sense that he has gradually become more involved in reality, in the lives and loves of the people who surround him. To begin with, his attention towards other people was always idealistic and somewhat abstract. His power of goodness only materialized as he physically and emotionally encountered his family and friends.

Chapter 24

In the short, final chapter of the novel, Julius is in Paris. It is autumn. He walks from art gallery to opera to luxury hotel. He is well dressed and glamorous as usual. Unusually, though, the narrator informs us from Julius’s point of view for the first time ever:

He was so much better now that he was not closely involved with human beings. Involvement was always bad for his nerves. He had friends at the biology department of the Sorbonne, but he felt no inclination to telephone them. He was happy, for the present, to be by himself in Paris, an outsider, even a tourist. (FHD:447)

There is no depth to his thought, nor any mention of the people whose lives have been so dramatically changed because of his manipulations. His pleasure is purely aesthetic in a Kierkegaardian sense, i.e. shallow. Most significantly in the quoted text is the awareness he seems to have of his otherness in relation to humanity. He identifies positively with being an outsider, and thus not involved in relationships with people. Finally, Julius finds a little restaurant, where the menu looks good: “The sun was warm upon his back. Life was good.” (FHD:447) It is here that the ultimate confirmation of the “evilness” of Julius occurs: He has the sun at his back, and is not facing it. However, his story, his identity, and what he represents is much more of a paradox than these parting words convey. The contradiction between the two final sentences is interesting: In what way is “life good”?

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The novel thus ends on an ambivalent note. It conveys in extremis the juxtaposition of different perspectives, truths and meanings which have been developed throughout the novel: in the plotted action, the narrative form, symbolism and intertextuality, and not least, in the multivoiced relationships between the characters, the author, narrator and myself as reader. The meaning of the novel is unfinalized. The story ends, but the plot never reaches closure.²⁰² Its truths are suspended, but attending to the loves, lives and suffering of the characters is nevertheless an exercise in moral discernment. To understand a novel is to interact with it. The act of interpretation is to become part of a polyphonic orchestration, be it in cacophony or harmony.

9. Moral Authority in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

a) A Summary of the Close Reading: Four Dual Perspectives

In order to summarize this study of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and to provide productive links to the coming sections of my discussion, I will draw attention to four dominant themes which have surfaced (more or less explicitly) during my interpretation of the novel. I have chosen to identify them as follows: *Sameness and Difference*, *Appearance and Reality*, *Power*

²⁰² Heusel: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels*, p.82.

and *Submission*, and *Vision and Voice*.²⁰³ These four elements have in common that they are *dual perspectives whose internal structural relation is one of dynamic tension*. It has been my hermeneutic (interpretative) strategy to look for such ambivalent motifs in the text of the novel, which was an intention I developed in Part II. Further, the attempt to recognise dialectic patterns in the novel has been performed with a methodological attitude which also transcends the text itself, in that I have given attention to the many voices which enter the interpretative process. I have let Murdoch the philosopher's voice enter several times, as well as tried to make my own interpretative voice audible. Some other voices have also occasionally been represented: those of other critics, and those which intertexts represent. The intention has been double: to dig deeply into the complexity of the text itself, as well as to open up to other perspectives. The four units which I have identified provide rich and fertile sources to my discourse on the conditions for interpreting the problem of moral authority in a contemporary setting. The thrust towards the conclusion of my thesis, will now be to show how these trickling rivulets gradually might come together in a fat and flowing river.

I have often referred to the first of the doublets in the close reading. The motif of *Sameness and Difference* has been identified with respect to particular characters, to reflections on the dynamic of form and content, and to the relation between text and intertext. Most important, however, has been to show how most of the characters are portrayed in terms of relational constructions in which the oscillation between identification and differentiation has been central. This aspect of *Sameness and Difference* is a necessary background to the forthcoming interpretations of singular characters. It would be impossible to study Tallis, Julius or Morgan without understanding the deep relationality (or lack of such) by which they are constructed as characters. The motif has also proved to be relevant to understanding the minor characters in terms of relational "units", for instance those of Axel and Rupert, Hilda and Morgan, Simon and Axel, Rupert and Hilda, Morgan and Rupert and so forth.

The most obvious example of a character who is developed along the lines of the ambiguity of *Sameness and Difference*, is Morgan. This concerns first and foremost the Gemini/twin-motif, in which she is cast as a twin to both Tallis and Simon. In several passages she is interchangeable with (or the same as) Simon, or Tallis's twin sister, but also that she in fundamental respects also must be understood in terms of radical difference in the same relationships. Her

²⁰³ Several other "couplets" would have been possible in a summary of the close reading. I have chosen to restrict them to the mentioned four in order to tighten the focus. Two supplementing alternatives could have been, for instance, *Freedom and Determination*, and *Fragmentation and Disintegration*.

story is one of a continuous search for true identification, ultimately with herself. This was particularly highlighted in the scene where she is lost in the Underground. Her experience with the pigeon both as herself and different to herself is a pregnant symbol of this quest. However, she often ends up in relationships in which she either mistakes what true sameness or true difference between her and the other involves. This leads to unhealthy structures of submission and egoism. Her story casts light on the life quest of humanity.

The relation between Julius and Tallis can also gain much from an interpretation in terms of the dialectic of *Sameness and Difference*. They are identifiable (same) in their common “status” in the novel: they are both above, or different to, humanity. They can both be interpreted as being “instruments of justice”, and they are both literary representations of abstract ideas. It is at this level that I will speak about Julius and Tallis as *types*. As such, they are often spoken of in terms of one another. In contrast to this, however, their individual narratives are different at a deeper level. Julius is never identified from the perspective of ‘sameness’ with others than Tallis. Tallis, on the other hand, is cast in several such constellations, in particular with his dead twin, the Trinity of Notting Hill and with Morgan. I would like to suggest that as *types*, they are the same, although opposites to some extent, whereas they as *individuals* are irresolvably different. Thus, at a formal level, and in the sense that Tallis and Julius are representations of ideas (‘good’ and ‘evil’), the appropriate understanding of difference is in terms of a dichotomic relation between them. Julius *is not* Tallis. Evil *is not* good. At a narratively substantial level, on the other hand, the difference between them cannot be identified easily, and they cannot be spoken of in terms of one another. They are both much more ambivalent characters. The difference is not dichotomic, but incommensurable. The appropriate interpretative strategy must therefore be a hermeneutic based on radical difference.

The above identification of Julius and Tallis as *types* versus *individuals* also has to do with the tension in the novel between form and content. As ‘form’/*type* they more or less live up to a reader’s expectation of what the ‘bad’ and ‘good’ person in literature is like (Julius more so than Tallis). ‘Good’ and ‘evil’ in literature are more often than not represented by characters who share characteristic traits, and are therefore recognised as being ‘same’ (as has been commented on concerning the many intertextual references to Julius and Tallis). Such images do little to destabilise given images of ‘evil’ and ‘good’. Rather, they illustrate, and thus solidify, formally authoritative conceptions of moral concepts. As ‘content’/*individual*, however, their stories challenge traditionally authoritative images of such moral ideas in that they are

different from the archetypes. The inversion of recognisable “sameness” is precisely what challenges, provides new perspectives and opens up to the reader’s rethinking what he or she believes to be ‘good’, or ‘evil’.

A further aspect of the close reading in which the doubleness of *Sameness and Difference* was identified, was with respect to the presence of intertextual references to Shakespeare, Plato, the Bible and others. The point I wish to make here echoes the one above concerning inversion of the known. I have shown several examples of intertext whose function in the novel is double: it sometimes provides direct and productive references which can open up the scope of an interpretation. On the other hand, the difference between the external text and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* can be just as illuminating. The inversion, or even perversion of the known and familiar, forces new perspectives into action, thus challenging given conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

Sameness and Difference thus also has a methodological implication. It has been important to point out that what can be seen as ‘same’ from one angle, can from another angle be interpreted more appropriately in terms of ‘difference’. An interpretative strategy which involves de-centring myself and the perspective from which I study the text (to the extent that this is possible), brings a note of ambivalence to any conclusions I can tentatively draw. The strategy corresponds well with Murdoch’s literary technique, which is to create such perspectivism within the text.²⁰⁴ The ‘unfinalizability’ of the interpretation is, therefore, a result both of an unresolved text just as much as the nature of a hermeneutic process.

The second motif, *Appearance and Reality*, has occurred in the text of my close reading almost as often as *Sameness and Difference*. The primary metaphor by which to approach this doublet, is Plato’s parable of the cave, which has provided intertextual contributions to the analysis. I shall not, however, give much attention to it in this summary, because it will be treated in further depth in a different context.²⁰⁵ Some things must nevertheless be said at this stage. I have, so far, tried to make clear how deep ambivalence is an inescapable aspect of interpretation of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. An argument for this which supplements the discussion above, is that the centre of the novel’s plot revolves around a tension between what *appears to be real* on the one hand, and what *is real* on the other. Thus, in the close reading, the motif has been helpful in order to uncover what is at stake for the characters involved. Further, the tension between *Appearance and Reality* is also reflected in the subtle shift from

²⁰⁴ This will be discussed further in Part IV, Chapter 11.

²⁰⁵ Again, see Part IV, Chapter 11.

an omniscient narrator in Part One, to a less knowledgeable narrator from the beginning of Part Two.

The central plot is Julius's manipulation of Morgan and Rupert into thinking that what appears to be real (love) is, in fact, nothing but vanity and egoism. This playing of games, or in other words: Julius's conscious inversion of the other characters' conceptions of reality, begins to end first when Simon pushes Julius into the Foster's swimming pool. In doing this, he exposes the "monstrous reality" of Julius. His "real" nature appears as his apparent image dissolves when he almost drowns in the water. (Or does it? I shall return to some further ambiguities concerning this scene in the discussion of the character Julius in Chapter 15.) Talis's role at the end of the novel also concerns this motif. He encourages Julius to telephone Hilda in order to expose the truth of what has happened. In this, reality takes precedence over appearances.

Transitions between *Appearance and Reality* also has major interpretative value with respect to the stories of both Morgan and Simon, but from two different points of view. Morgan's story has shown that she often believes that she has finally arrived at true insight. Several times she imagines herself in a condition of clear vision and insight after years of blindness to reality. However, she seems to move from one apparent reality to the next. This movement stands in stark contrast to what happens in Simon's story. He is sorely aware that what he can see is only apparent. His problem is that he cannot quite identify what is real. He feels that Julius has captured his consciousness, and experiences a powerlessness concerning his own capacity for discernment. Therefore, he remains in a situation of confusion and unhappiness during much of the novel's time-span. This gradually changes during the novel. His story culminates when he manages to tell Axel the whole story of what he has seen, felt and experienced. This is, for Simon, a stripping of pride and self-consciousness, and involves emotional "blood and pain". Because of this, however, the couple can concentrate on what is real between them, and their relationship is no longer ruined by speculations and what seems to them both to be the threat of the other's apparent fascination for Julius.

The continuous movement between *Appearance and Reality* which constitutes the plot, is further enhanced by many of the novel's central symbols. The most important of these is light, or rather: degrees of (artificial) light by which the characters are enabled (or not) to see reality as it is. Another is the recurring image of a mirror (twice in connection with Hilda and at the carnivalistic garden party), which has double connotations to the aspect of appearance versus reality. What is important, is that all such symbols are ambiguous. It is not easy to tell

what, in the novel, is not what it appears to be. This uncertainty (which both characters and readers have) is central to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Not least, the question of who defeats who runs through the story as a destabilizing notion.

The third thematic unit which recurs many times in the novel, can be identified as issues of *Power and Submission*. This evokes both dyads above, in that the active and passive aspects of both power and submission are intricately linked with the relationality inherent in the *Sameness and Difference*-factor, and that the text provides a complex exploration of apparent versus real power. In the discussion of power and authority in this thesis's Part I, I showed how issues of power can partially be understood in the light of symmetric power (sameness) versus asymmetric power (difference). Understanding the dialectic of sameness and difference as a dynamic relation of *shifting perspectives*, thus has consequences for how one can recognize which character is to be identified as powerful in a given situation. This axis of egalitarianism crosses an axis concerning whether power is seen as a hierarchical structure, or as a network of power-relations. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, different examples of power in action and consciousness "fit" a variety of combinations of these axes. Thus, there is an ambiguity inherent in both the terms 'power' and 'submission'. Power in the novel is both a negative and a positive, as is submission. Therefore, a question that permeates the novel, is one of who *appears* to be powerful, and who *has* power? Further: how is power identified as being 'good', or 'bad'? Whose perspective does the reader identify with? And finally: how is 'power' to be understood?

During most of the novel, Julius has a determining power in unjust relationships. He does not see the other *as other*, with "loving vision". Therefore, the imbalance between him and, for instance Morgan, is nonrelational. Such a non-egalitarian and static hierarchy is enhanced by the repeating (formal) ascription of "superhumanity" to Julius. This provides him with a form of authority. In relation to Julius, however, there is an important distinction between two of the characters who are submitted to Julius's power and authority, namely Morgan and Simon. In the scene in Julius's flat, I showed that Morgan when casts herself as 'slave' to Julius's 'master', she *empowers* her ego, her vanity and capacity for consoling fantasy. Thus, the motif of Morgan's submission to Julius is ambivalent, in that suffering provides the ego with a power to act. Both parties are powerful in a negative sense. Such power is counter to what Murdoch sees as the ideal process of 'unselfing', which is necessary for moral vision and wisdom, and is what "most human love consists of".

Simon is also cast in a submissive relation to Julius during much of the story. He feels that he cannot withstand the power Julius has over him. While Morgan says the same several times, there is a difference between the characters: Morgan revels in the suffering, Simon is devastated by it. Morgan seeks submission, and believes that suffering in relation to Julius is her journey to true selfhood. Simon cannot avoid being drawn to Julius, but does not see his suffering as a “cleansing” martyrdom. Simon’s passive acceptance of Julius’s power over him is, however, not the end of Simon’s story. I have discussed the motif of empowerment in Simon’s story, which was symbolized by his audible voice, and in his release from submission to father-figures such as Rupert and Axel. Simon’s plot is therefore very different to Morgan’s, and their common experience of submission to Julius has two very different outcomes. Thus, the empowerment of the individual is ambivalent: in the sense that the ego is enhanced, empowerment is counter to the ‘good’ self, and suffering is vanity. In the sense that the self is empowered to take action in the acknowledgement of other people’s suffering (in Simon’s case the Jamaican, Axel and Morgan), and submission is a humble acceptance of one’s nothingness, then power is a necessary aspect of the moral quest for ‘goodness’.

Issues of power also relate to Tallis. He, like Julius, is “superhuman” in a formal sense (several aspects of his story indicate this). As superhuman ‘good’, however, Tallis is not particularly authoritative. He does not seem to have any power at all. In fact, he comes across as pathetic, and spineless. Ultimately, he loses the battle. This is exemplified, for instance, in his failure to explain to Peter why stealing is wrong, in his relation to his father (whose abuse he submits to quietly) and his lack of standing up to his wife’s lover. It is not until Tallis forcefully responds to the harassment of the Jamaican man in the Chinese restaurant (continuing Simon’s feeble attempts), that his power comes into existence. His power at the end of the novel is great, however, in that Julius meekly accepts Tallis’s insistence that he phones Hilda, and thus, unravels the evil spell cast by the magician Julius. He is defeated by the power of evil. He does not, however, purely submit himself to Julius, but is empowered to act honourably.

The relation between Tallis and Julius is, however, also ambivalent in a further sense with respect to power. The plot of the novel echoes the wager between God and the Adversary in the book of Job. God submits his power to the Adversary, who acts as “an instrument of justice” by exposing human morality as self-centred and lacking of moral vision. Further, Julius’s power as creator/destructor (expanded in the Leviathan motif which I shall return to later) is also an ambivalent power. In light of this, I shall later suggest that it is Julius who

suffers a “fairly honourable defeat” at the hands of Simon, who turns the balance of power by pushing Julius into the pool, and exposing him as a vulnerable monster. The relationship between (misuse of) power and suffering also comes to the foreground at the end of the novel, when Julius turns out to be a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust.

The issue of power is important to the main discussions of this thesis in that the aspect of agency is central to the working definition of moral authority: 1) *The substantial content of a moral concept which on a wide basis can convincingly seen to be true, and 2) which motivates and empowers the moral agent to act in accordance with it.* Agency is thus a question of empowerment to action, and therefore, intricately linked with the authority *by which* one is empowered and acts. The analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* gives ample background to understanding and developing reasons for why a substantial and relational/dynamic approach to the authority by which we are empowered to act, is preferable to a formal and static approach to such authority. An unqualified submission to external authority is counter to the autonomy the moral agent must have in order to be a responsible subject (Morgan and in part, Simon). Submission to an internal authority, which includes a dialogue with the voice, or perspective, of the external other, is a way in which to understand autonomy and authority as a humble and relationally oriented attitude to motivation and empowerment with respect to action (Tallis, and in part, Simon).

Finally in this sub-section, I shall identify a last couplet of words which can serve to summarize and lead ahead to further discussions of what I have found in the close reading. The two words have been central to the analysis, but have not until now been seen in relation to each other. *Vision and Voice* are symbols that have permeated the novel at many stages and in many settings.

I have brought this dyad to the foreground for several reasons. Of such reasons, one is that they provide an interesting perspective on the link between Murdoch and Bakhtin, whose theories both enter into dialogue with the novel. My main point here, is that the central metaphors they use, namely Murdochian Vision and Bakhtinian Voice, have several denominators in common. First of all, both link many of the dyads above together. *Voice* signifies reciprocal dialogue between the same and different, and is textually present in the many dialogues of the novel. It has also been a symbol of agency and empowerment. *Vision* signifies seeing the other, seeing reality as it is. To pay attention to something is to see, both metaphorically and in reality.

Further, there is a reciprocal aspect to them both. We see, we are seen. We talk and we listen. These are relational issues, and there have been examples of such dynamics many times in the novel. Lack of relational selfhood and utter loneliness in their symbolic (or real) deaths is symbolized several times: Tallis sees, but is not seen, by his sister's apparition, Morgan sees, but is not seen, by the apparition of Tallis. Leonard sees, but cannot be seen because he is becoming "transparent" as he is dying. Simon and Axel see each other, Hilda only sees herself in a mirror and Morgan thinks she sees the other but always sees herself. There are many other examples. Concerning voice, I have already pointed to issues of audibility, empowerment and relationality in Simon's story, and the deeply perspectivist and relational aspect of the novel *as dialogue*. Voice also implies a public and open discourse as opposite to secrets and silence. Simon's problem is secrecy in silence. Julius's manipulation is silent: he does it by construction a love affair which is initialized through letters, and watches silently as the plot unfolds into apparent reality. Morgan and Rupert speak of the silence they must keep towards Hilda, and the plot is only resolved when Julius must raise his voice and *speak* to one of the people (Hilda) on which he has inflicted suffering.

Finally, the common denominator of *Vision and Voice* is that they really and truly belong to the physical world. It is probably because of this that they are so powerful as metaphors. This is an important aspect of the novel – both in general, and in the particular case of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. A reason for turning to literature when seeking answers as to how to live our lives as fragile human beings, is that ultimately, the reality about which one as an ethicist speaks, is a physical world where we see, hear, smell, taste and feel as well as reflect. Human life and experience is about more than cognition, it is about sensing. Vision and voice are more than metaphors. The turn to literature in ethics is more than just a philosophical insistence that it is important to understand the moral subject as embedded. Literature is represented reality, and the reality it represents is full of people who look and listen. We can learn what it means to see or not to see, to listen or not to listen, as well as being challenged to imagine what reality looks like and sounds like from other perspectives than what we have access to through our own eyes and ears.

b) On Art and Reality

I entered the close reading on an ethical note, and shall conclude on one. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch writes the following about a discussion of art and religion, in the conclusion of a chapter titled "Comedy and Tragedy". Several of the themes I have identified in the novel are commented upon here:

I have been talking about the ambiguous conspiracy between art and religion, and about the idea or illusion of the limited whole, discussing these matters in relation to great and familiar images such as those offered to us by Plato and Shakespeare. The problem about philosophy, and about life, is how to relate large impressing illuminating general conceptions to the mundane ('messaging about') details of ordinary personal private existence. But can we still *use* these great images, can they go on helping us? How do the generalisations of philosophers connect with what I am doing in my day-to-day and moment-to-moment pilgrimage, how can metaphysics be a guide to morals? (MGM:146)

The answer to this last question, is – at least in part – to write novels. Fundamental aspects of the Murdochian understanding of the relation between literature and philosophy can be identified in the passage. They represent different aspects of moral pilgrimage. They are languages apart, but both about reality – and the two-way movement between the universal and the particular individual. She accepts that art is a lie, it is “consoling form”. But she also accepts that good art might be the best way to relate metaphysic (reflective) consciousness to day-to-day moral action. Good art asks open questions. It does not resolve paradox. It challenges the givenness of what we know and see, thus with a capacity of “piercing the veil” of our own illusions by casting light on the true reality of the other.

Nevertheless, art will never be reality. It will never be a perfect representation. Its authority will always be flawed, just as the authority of philosophy must be.²⁰⁶ In the novel, her “general illuminating conceptions” often come across as rather monologic (single-voiced). Most of the time they have been represented by way of given formal structures, such as the parable of the cave, or the grand Biblical narrative. I have attempted to show how the analogies have functioned as recurring deep images, by help of which much of the novel can be interpreted. In this sense Murdoch’s voice is an authority which, in giving matter form, upholds the illusion of “the limited whole”.

However, countering this mode of external authority which, I think, cannot (and need not) be escaped, is Murdoch’s technique of de-centring her own voice in the sense that her grand schemes are somewhat opaque. The characters’ individual narratives often challenge and invert the interpretative models which Murdoch’s audible voice provides. The Biblical and Shakespearian myths and structures are perverted, twisted and broken. The allegory of the

²⁰⁶ In a Bakhtinian sense, her comments above to the relation between art, religion and philosophy represents Murdoch the philosopher’s voice as an external authority with respect to the text. More to this, see Part IV, Chapter 10.

cave is *there* as a sub-text, but often disrupted. Her own voice can also sometimes be heard in and through characters, but these often are minor or unsympathetic characters.²⁰⁷

Levels and modes of understanding are (somehow) levels and modes of existence. My general being coexists with my particular being. We are faced with these difficulties in our apprehensions of art and religion. Fiction writers have, instinctively or reflectively, to solve the problem of this coexistence when they portray characters in books, and we the readers appreciate and judge their solution, and exercise many different kinds of insight when doing so. The creation and appreciation of a novel is a complex highly diversified operation. (MGM:146)

Thereby the authority of her voice becomes destabilized, thus entering the internal dialogue of the novel and exploring “layers and modes of understanding”. I shall return to a further development of this exploration in the forthcoming analysis of characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

²⁰⁷ Heusel: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels*, p.36.

PART IV: Philosophical Voices

10. Paul Ricoeur and Mikhail M. Bakhtin

10.1. Hermeneuts in Dialogue

As I argued in Part II, Murdoch's philosophical texts, as well as Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, are all important to the work I do in this thesis. They have influenced the close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, as has become apparent throughout Part III. Their texts also contribute substantially to the work I shall be doing in Part V, both with respect to sharpening the analysis of the novel as well as providing expanding perspectives to the further discussion. The fact that they represent three different traditions of philosophical thought, and yet provide so many structures of thought which are similar to each other, make them an interesting trio to work with. The three are complimentary thinkers, although they never mention each other specifically. They are close enough to be used as relevant commentaries to each other, yet differ sufficiently to provide constructive challenges to one another.

I shall now, finally, introduce them in further depth. In the present chapter, I concentrate on Ricoeur and Bakhtin's work. As I have already presented an overview over Murdoch's philosophy in Part I, I shall in Chapter 11 focus specifically on one aspect of her work, namely her dominant use of visual imagery as conceptual metaphors. Before entering the Character analysis in Part V, I summarize and conclude what I will have developed so far concerning the problem of moral authority in Chapter 12.

10.2. Ricoeur: The Structure and Argument in *Oneself as Another*

Until and including *The Rule of Metaphor*,²⁰⁸ Paul Ricoeur's focus had primarily been on the hermeneutics of textual criticism, metaphoric language and the meaning of symbol. After this, he shifted towards philosophic analysis of creative language, narrative, temporality and human action. In the wake of *Time and Narrative*, *Oneself as Another* followed in 1990.²⁰⁹ Here he brings with him the complex and widespread interests from before, and develops an understanding of narrative identity in the methodological context of his "hermeneutics of selfhood".

²⁰⁸ Ricoeur, Paul: *The Rule of Metaphor. Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. London 1986 (1st ed 1975: *La métaphore vive*, translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ.)

²⁰⁹ *Oneself as Another* will hereafter be abbreviated to "OA" and referred to directly in the text.

This book has much more of an ethical focus than his earlier work, and there are several aspects of particular interest to the forthcoming micro-hermeneutic readings and discussions of Murdoch's work, and to macro-hermeneutic aspects of the dissertation's argument. In order to understand the particular elements of Ricoeur's contribution in this dissertation, it is necessary to see them in the context of the totality of the argument he develops in *Oneself as Another*. Therefore, I shall present them in the logical order they are presented by Ricoeur himself.

In the introduction to *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur points out three of his basic intentions. The three are introduced to the reader by his reflections over the title. The first intention is to understand selfhood as being fundamentally reflective, the second intention concerns personal identity understood as being internally relational (the idem/ipse-split), and finally, to show that 'self' is always posited in relation to 'other'. The spiralling dynamic of this triad forms the sub-structure of a journey towards the final construction of a hermeneutics of self. This method of detour leads to a conclusion in which the hermeneutics of the self is extended from a primarily phenomenological study into a metaphysical, ontological and fundamentally ethical sphere.

The first of these considerations concerns the difference between 'self' and 'I'. His point is that 'I' refers to nothing more than "the immediate positing of the self" (OA:1), whereas the concept of 'self' transcends the 'I'. 'I' is just a name I give myself. Ricoeur points out that we have a conception of '(my)self' as referring to something deeper than designation. It is the self that thinks and exists, not the I. 'I' is thus a very "thin" concept. 'Self' is the reflective form, and involves a more complex understanding of who the self that is to be found "behind" the grammatical first person is. So, what exactly is selfhood, and how can we best speak of it? In Ricoeur's opinion, traditional philosophies of the cogito correspond to the "thinness" of the 'I'. By way of investigating and criticizing the opposite opinions of Descartes and Nietzsche, he is able to show that the 'I' presupposed in such cogito philosophies, is misunderstood in two ways. *Either* it is given status as the isolated foundation on which all other thought lies (Descartes), *or* it is denuded of all content by nihilistic suspicion (Nietzsche). The main problem lies in the fact that in either case, the 'I' is decontextualized, or exists "atopos" in discourse (OA:16). Ricoeur's point is that knowledge about the self is neither apriori (idealism), nor impossible to attain (scepticism). Knowledge of this kind can only be developed hermeneutically, i.e. by interpretation of experience, texts and culture. Such interpretation covers this "middle ground" between idealism and scepticism.

The second intention prepares an investigation of ways to speak of selfhood in a way that belongs to the hermeneutic “middle ground” mentioned above. Ricoeur carefully develops an analysis of the concept of ‘self’, based on reflection on semantic constructions in French, German, English and Latin. His focus is on the polysemy of the French use of ‘même’ (same) and ‘soi-même’ (myself). Two kinds of identity are distinguished by the use of the Latin terms ‘idem’ and ‘ipse’. They both represent possible understandings of the term ‘identical’.²¹⁰ *Idem* refers to ‘sameness’, both with respect to quality and quantity. This sameness is comparative. Thus, ‘same’ belongs with other comparative terms like ‘contrary’, ‘distinct’ and ‘other’. Idem-identity also denominates temporal permanence concerning the self – i.e. the expectation that one will stay the same over time.

Iipse, on the other hand, means ‘self’ as in ‘himself’ or ‘herself’, and refers to an identifiable person. Ricoeur uses the term ‘selfhood’ as a translation of *ipse*. This ipse-identity can largely be said to represent character, i.e. designating the self’s “lived life” in its historical context. However, it is not quite as simple as equating selfhood (ipse) and character. I will return to a more complex discussion on this later.²¹¹ The main focal point of the ipse-identity, that distinguishes it from idem-identity, is that its content can only be understood in the dynamic of selfhood in relation to otherness. The ipse-identity is one that presents ‘(her-/him-/my-) self’ as historically distinct from ‘another’.

Both these forms of identity are necessary poles in a hermeneutic understanding of self. They are irreducible to each other, and cannot be incorporated in each other. Self should not be understood as a solipsistic “core personality” - but as a relational form of identity. So far, then, the self can only be understood as a dialectic relation in the *polarity of idem and ipse*. This dialectic is one of many in Ricoeur’s philosophy. It is important to understand the poles not as dichotomies, but as dynamic and interdependent terms. It is also important to see the “result” of the dialectic as including all aspects of both poles, and not as a nondescript middle way, or a harmonious synthesis. The dynamic interaction of corresponding terms in his dialectics will also include conflict. The middle ground is never simple or easy to come to terms with. According to Ricoeur, the best way to speak meaningfully of it, will be by turning to the narrative category as epistemological frame. The idea of narration therefore gives a form to the interplay between for instance idem- and ipse-identity. Here Ricoeur brings the temporal di-

²¹⁰ His argument here does not translate well into English, as it is tightly bound to nuances in the French language.

²¹¹ Cf. Part V, Chapter 13.3.

mension into his argument. It is necessary to understand selfhood as narrative. Every person belongs in time - each life with a beginning, middle and end along a time-line. The key to telling the story of one's life is to comprehend self both as *idem* and *ipse*. Understanding selfhood in narrative categories will therefore include both these dimensions.

The third intention concerns relationality of a kind that transcends the individual self. As already mentioned, Ricoeur places his hermeneutics of the self "above" and different to both a Cartesian philosophy of the cogito, and its opposition as found in Nietzsche's philosophy. An important aspect here, is that selfhood (*ipse*) is not self contained and historical, as Descartes would say. It is identified in its contextual, reflective and always dynamic relation to other. This relation between self and other than self is therefore yet another fundamental dialectic in Ricoeur's philosophy. His hermeneutic understanding of selfhood is very different to foundational cogito philosophies. In such philosophies, otherness is understood as opposite to sameness. In Ricoeur, it is extended to mean "otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of selfhood as such" (OA:3). This further implies that the other is not (as in for instance Emmanuel Levinás' philosophy) something external to the individual that in turn gives self his or her meaning (Cf. OA:334f). The 'other' gives self its meaning by being part of the self in the sense that otherness belongs to the structure of selfhood. Selfhood can therefore not be understood unless it is seen as something inherent in the difference between, or polarity of, the self and the surrounding world.

Ricoeur extends the understanding of self from being a "thin" 'I', as in the philosophies of the cogito, to a more substantial, relational and contextually dependent self. In one way one can speak of "first order" and "second order" modes of being (OA:19). The most basic, the first order mode of being, is that of selfhood. However, unless selfhood is understood in close relation to action, i.e. a self that (inter)acts, it becomes what Ricoeur wishes to avoid, namely a decontextualized self. The self has, and must have, its topos in praxis, which means that it must designate itself as 'I'. 'Self' and 'I' are therefore closely intertwined. The 'I' is the subject of action, whereas the self represents the reflexivity concerning action. The self is in a position to tell the story of what I do. Here lies the core of the link between a hermeneutics of selfhood, and the place of ethics as a fundamental aspect to human life.

In practice, the thematic unity of Ricoeur's argument towards developing a hermeneutics of selfhood, is structured by the question "Who...?". Who (is the I that) speaks? Who acts? Who tells his or her story? Who is responsible? The treatment of these questions forms a second, more progressive sub-structure in the text. By the use of 'action' as a necessary criterion for

understanding selfhood as dependent on praxis, Ricoeur shows how a hermeneutics of self must have ethical implications. The argument of the book gradually brings the two perspectives (self and action) together, forming a triad that Ricoeur formulates as an (ethical) “three-step rhythm: describing, narrating, prescribing” (OA:20). Problems of language, meaning, reference and action thus concern descriptive aspects of ethics. Questions concerning narrative and narrative identity cover a “middle ground”, and lead towards issues of responsibility and normativity, or what Ricoeur calls the prescribing aspect of ethics.

There are two main points to draw from Ricoeur’s discussion of language, which he discusses by way of the question “who speaks”. The first is the realization that in order for an ‘I’ to have meaning, one has to understand it in its dialectic relation to a ‘you’. This means that by identifying reference to the self, one presupposes a situation of interlocution (speaking together). In isolation, the utterance ‘I’ has no referential meaning. The ‘I’ and ‘you’ are and must be fully reversible. This insight can be extended to the second point: that the interchangeable relation of (passive) patient/sufferer and (active) actor/agent can be clearly seen in narrative. A story is driven by the continuous movement in that different characters speak. When one character speaks, the other is passive. And vice versa. This is at the centre of the dynamic of a narrative. The characters – the active and the passive, the I and you – are all logically dependent on each other. This reciprocity is fundamental to Ricoeur’s argument.

Ricoeur extends his linguistic considerations of the subject in the sentence “who speaks?” by moving on to the question “who acts?”. Theories of action that prevail in the English speaking philosophical world have, in Ricoeur’s opinion, reduced actions (the answer to the question “What?”) to singular events and their motives (the answer to the question “Why?”). His goal is to unify the terms ‘agent’ and ‘action’ - something that has not been done in traditional philosophies of action. Ricoeur points out that the question “who is the agent of action” is far more relevant than either “what is the action” or “why is it done”. This is because it is never possible to see an action isolated from a longer string of actions, and the often indistinguishable motives behind them. Actions always belong in complex networks, says Ricoeur. A single action cannot be understood other than by seeing it in relation to other actions that together form a “practice” (MacIntyre). Aristotle’s use of “techne” and Wittgensteinian “games” convey something of the same idea, he says. The unifying concept in these situations, is therefore not the question of single actions and their motives or intentions that the “what” and “why” seek an answer to, but the identity of the agent. In developing an understanding of action that also brings to attention the actual persons, with a contextually based

self (ipseity), we will find possibilities to understand the close connections between the self and the actions it does.

Ricoeur argues, against speech-act theorists, that by using the term ‘intention’, one presupposes a verifiable truth content. Either an intention was true, or it was false. This, says Ricoeur, is a problematic and simplistic presupposition in hermeneutics. Instead of thinking in terms of verifiable (or falsifiable) truth, Ricoeur turns to ‘conviction’ as the most suitable term for referring to hermeneutic truth. Truth is something we are convinced by. Our conviction of what is true is verified not by doxological proof, but by ‘attestation’. Says Ricoeur: “Whereas doxic belief is implied in the grammar of ‘I believe-that,’ attestation belongs to the grammar of ‘I believe-in’” (OA:21). The idea of attestation in Ricoeur’s philosophy refers to the level of truth obtainable in hermeneutics. The phenomenon of which we are convinced is true, is what gives the human agent its “power to act” (OA:112).

The way to fully appreciate the intention of an action in its complexity of meaning is to relate phenomenologically to the agent’s “intention-to” in context. The intention-to is closely connected with the notion of an actual person performing a specific action in a particular situation. An abstract intention is impossible to relate to. We cannot come to terms with the broader background of action without considering the particularity of the action in question. This way, the “why” of an action is transferred to the broader realm of identity, i.e. the “who”. The agent understood as a person with a narrative history and future is “thick” enough to attest to the “intention-to” of a situation. The relevance of introducing attestation at this point has to do with clarifying what the role of action and that of an “intention-to” is in relation to the dynamics of selfhood. Ricoeur writes that “the attestation of the intention to... is at the same time the attestation of the self” (OA:73). His argument is that an analytic (verifiable) ontology of events cannot account for the ascription of actions to their agent. This is because the connecting link between an action’s specific context and the decontextualized and static idea of an agent is missing. Instead, one would have to operate by turning to a different kind of ontology, one that takes into account that the self in question is “a being in the making” (OA:86), thereby providing the model with the needed connection. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of self is precisely this “ontology of a different kind” that is needed. The dynamic nature of self is by definition a self “in the making”, continuously suspended in the movement between the poles of idem and ipse, self and other, and finally, between the historical context of action (praxis) and the future aspect implied by “intention-to” (telos).

Here I must return to the triad of describing, narrating and prescribing that was mentioned earlier. Ricoeur argues against Hannah Arendt's view (in which she echoes Heidegger). Her opinion is that "action is that aspect of human doing that calls for narration. And it is the function of narration, in its turn, to determine the 'who of action'" (OA:58). This is a too narrow view of the role of narration. It is too closely bound to an external understanding of action, and implies only narrative as description. For Ricoeur, action is best understood in networks of action-chains, or practices, and where the agent sometimes must act according to ethical demands that transcend "the who of action" (i.e. character). Consequentially, narration representing action networks must be a wider concept, i.e. a mimetic representation of the dialectic of description and prescription, of action and agent. Further, corresponding to this, narration is also the mode by which to understand the dynamic of selfhood in *idem* and *ipse*, and of self and other. In this way, attestation and narration are linked closely together. They both belong to the "middle ground" of a hermeneutics of self. The truth content of a narrative is served by attestation, not epistemological ontology. This also implies that fiction can be "true", in that it can provide conviction that gives the agent its "power to act".

Recall that Ricoeur sees narrative identity as being "between" description and prescription. How does he develop this triadic structure? His point of departure is descriptive: "(T)he person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends have a history, are their own history" (OA:113). Self and its actions are in this manner closely linked to the notion of historical context, i.e. character. But, he says, there is another aspect of personal identity that has to be considered, and that is the (prescriptive) question of self-maintenance. As historical persons, we are part of a society, and it is demanded of us that we adapt to norms, rules, responsibilities and values. Such ethical commands pose themselves as 'other' to character, but are nevertheless crucial to understanding personal identity. In order to articulate this double problematic of personal identity, Ricoeur returns again to the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* (OA:114). They represent different understandings of the term 'identical', as should be familiar by now. It is the temporal aspects of this difference that is introduced here, and provides Ricoeur with material for a deeper understanding of selfhood. How is it possible to say that someone is the same person both as a baby and as a ninety-year old? The person certainly does not look identical at the different stages of life. So, in what way does identity relate to the question of permanence in time? This is the crucial factor here. Ricoeur points out two immediate models in which we think of permanence in time: we think of it in terms of charac-

ter, and in terms of keeping promises (OA:118). It is in the polarity of these two ways of understanding the time factor that Ricoeur's hypothesis on narrative identity finds its place.

Ricoeur defines the term 'character' as designating the set of "lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (OA:121). Character therefore expresses the coinciding of *idem* (sameness - the recognition factor) and *ipse* (selfhood - the sense that these dispositions or habits *are me*). *Idem* and *ipse* are still distinct from each other, but do not stand in opposition: "(M)y character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself as *idem*." (OA: 121). This pole, the pole of character, represents the descriptive part of Ricoeur's guiding triad. At the other pole, we find the ethical dimension of prescription. Here *idem* and *ipse* no longer coincide, but remain separate from each other. Keeping one's word does not depend on *idem* - i.e. sameness. On the contrary, a promise is a promise even if my character has changed since the promise was given. Keeping my word is a responsibility I have, although the context and my habits have been altered. "Self-constancy" belongs to *ipse*, or selfhood. Therefore, we see that *idem* is other than *ipse*, forming a dialectic relation.

From this it follows that narrative identity oscillates between two limits within selfhood. Ricoeur designates these as being "a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit, where the *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem*" (OA: 124). At both of these levels of Ricoeur's narrative model, the dialectics of description and prescription, character and demand, experience and norm, practice and ethics, and context and ideal are integrated. However, this is not sufficient. Ricoeur therefore continues: "narrative theory can genuinely mediate between description and prescription only if the broadening of the practical field and the anticipation of ethical considerations are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating" (OA: 115). Ricoeur thus turns to literary (narrative) theory, to see in what way it can function as a mediator between narrative as mimesis of practice (a descriptive dimension) and narrative as a "laboratory of moral judgement" (OA:140) (a prescriptive dimension).

Ricoeur is explicit in his reference to literary theory. There are in particular two factors that are significant with regard to my own work with *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. The first of these is the introduction of the term 'emplotment' (OA:141). (This is in a direct continuation of an analysis of emplotment in *Time and Narrative*.) A *plot* denominates the organizing and interconnecting of events in a story. Each individual life story has its plot. An important dimension of the plot is its function as a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (OA:140). The concept of emplotment therefore enables us to understand how action-related experiences of con-

tingency, discontinuity and conflict can be integrated in a meaningful narrative. This is crucial in that these factors all seem to oppose sameness/*idem*-identity. Moving from the notion of emplotment of action, Ricoeur shifts to a discussion of how narrative emplotment presents character as the dialectic of sameness and selfhood. The paradoxes of contingency and necessity of a character's actions are rendered understandable through emplotment. Here we can recognize the two levels of narrative identity presented above. Characters in a narrative are themselves plots, and "the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself" (OA:143). In narrative theory, an important element of character is the question of "typology". "Spheres of action" (Propp), or "roles" (Bremond) are ascribed to the characters. Ricoeur focuses on one specific type of roles found in narrative: those of *agent* and *sufferer* (OA:144). These have been mentioned earlier, in the context of the reciprocity of human interlocution, i.e. that the roles of *self* and *other* of a conversation are always interchangeable and interdependent. It is important to Ricoeur that one must "never forget to speak of humans as acting and suffering" (OA:145). By turning the roles of narrative to actions, actions with ethical concerns, Ricoeur underlines the connection between narrative, action and the question of personal identity. This ethical dynamic of agent and sufferer also corresponds to the dynamic of self and other.

The second important use Ricoeur makes of literary theory lies in his reference to Greimas' actantial model (OA:145). The first important point concerning this model is that the term 'character' is replaced with the non-anthropomorphic term 'actant'. This radicalises the model, and renders it possible to extend the narrative theory from particular stories to a more theoretical position, parallel to the narrative form that the extension from description of self to ethical prescription takes. The most characteristic point of Greimas' model is the movement of a story along three different axes: An axis of *desire* (between "haves" and "have nots"), one of *communication* (between senders and receivers) and one of *action* (between helpers and opponents) (OA:145). All stories move within the dialectics of the framework of this figurative model. The narrative model gives meaning to the idea of the "connectedness of life" in two respects: "first, that of a narrative program, then that of a polemical relation between two programs, from which results the opposition between subject and antsubject" (OA:145). Narrative meaning thus parallels hermeneutic meaning, and narrative structure corresponds to the dialectic and relational structures of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of self.

Ricoeur also points to the specific function of narrative that joins together actions, intentions, agents and sufferers in a sequence. A story provides an answer to the questions of "Who?"

that Ricoeur has used to find thematic unity. The consequence of this, says Ricoeur, is that: “It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (OA:148). A character in a story has a capacity to act (self), but is at the same time under certain necessary obligations (other). This corresponds to an understanding of narration as mediator between description and prescription with regard to action. Ricoeur makes the same point in relation to the concept of what MacIntyre calls “The narrative unity of a life” (OA:157). Narrative can thus be understood as the model of the continuous formation of (ethical) life in a dynamic relation between context (praxis) and ideals (normativity).

Towards the end of his meandering journey, Ricoeur continues his argument by explicating an ethical philosophy, closely knit with the concept of narrative selfhood. The foundations of Ricoeur’s discussion on moral aspects of human life lies in the now familiar triad of description - narration - prescription (OA:170). Ricoeur brings the analysis of narrative identity into a more specific ethical discussion on the relation between the practices of human life on the one side and moral obligation on the other. The question he asks here is: *Who is the subject of moral responsibility?* In order to discuss this in depth, Ricoeur makes an important distinction between his use of the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ (OA:170). *Ethics* is to articulate the aim of life, rooted in the contextual idea of the good life. This is given priority in his philosophy. There is a hermeneutic circle between our factual lives and the good life we seek (OA:179). He also takes the good life to be a life in the communities we belong to. *Morality* is for Ricoeur equivalent to universal normativity, i.e. justice and laws. Duties and norms have validity inasmuch as they incorporate respect of ‘the other’. They also have an important function as a “sieve”, in order to designate the good, and to prevent arbitrary situationism. The relation between ethics (description) and morality (prescription) is a dynamic relation corresponding to the relation between idem- and ipse-identity, and to the relation of self and other. In other words, the relation is best understood as a narrative structure.

Following this, there exists no opposition between universal and contextual perspectives in Ricoeur’s philosophy, but a close and supplementing relation. It is not Kant *or* Aristotle, but *both* (OA:290). The task of the agent is to bring what the two of them represent together in a way that corresponds to the complexity of human life. This means discerning what action ought to be taken (a prescriptive perspective) in a particular situation (a descriptive perspective). Narrativity is the interpretive code for this dynamic force which exists both at a micro-level (within selfhood: demand/character) and at a macro-level (within human life reality: morality/ethics). The ethical intention is defined by Ricoeur as: “aiming at the ‘good life’ with

and for others, in just institutions” (OA:172). This intention includes both a teleological and deontological position. Ricoeur regards the term ‘phronesis’, or moral wisdom, to be the means of achieving this aim. ‘Phronesis’ should be associated with the concepts of *attestation* (the level of truth attainable in hermeneutics - a belief of conviction that enables the individual to act), and *narrative* (the mode of mediation between the ethical aim and moral life). Moral wisdom is not doxological knowledge, but evolves from experience through the “double gaze” at practice in one end, and ideals in the other. It expresses itself through the careful judgement of how moral norms best serve the ethical aim.

As Ricoeur’s ethics is concerned with both meaning and action, and therefore the manner in which Ricoeur appropriates the concepts of justice and solicitude within his hermeneutics it is relevant. For him, ‘justice’ as a moral concept belongs to the prescriptive and context-transcending aspect of ethical theory. ‘Solicitude’ on the other hand, is a moral concept whose meaning it is impossible to decontextualize. It is in continuation of the above that an aspect of Ricoeur’s philosophy has direct relevance to a theological approach to ethics. To state it rather simply, Ricoeur opens up for us the possibility that ‘justice’ represents an ethics which has as its common ground all of humanity, and has a prescriptive aspect to it which is decontextualized in the sense that it transcends (but does not ignore) context. A Christian ethic ought to enhance the appropriation of ‘solicitude’, understanding it as a response to a given call. The idea of call, not command, suggests a deeply relational, neither relative nor universalistic mode of ethics.

10.3. Bakhtin’s Theory of Discourse in the Novel

Bakhtin’s work was translated from Russian into other European languages from the 1980’s onward, and has since then had a strong influence in several different arenas, particularly in aesthetics and literary theory. His translated work includes two books of literary criticism,²¹² one poetics of the novel²¹³ and an essay on selfhood (or “Being”) in literature and ethics.²¹⁴ It is difficult to place Bakhtin in a specific school of thought. Initially, he thought of himself in a German tradition. In his work, he often takes his point of departure from Kant’s philosophy. Later, however, his work becomes more idiosyncratic and many of his references are obscure

²¹² Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Manchester USA 1984, (1st ed 1929: translated by Caryl Emerson), and Bakhtin, Mikhail M: *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington USA 1984, (1st ed 1940: translated by Hélène Iswolsky).

²¹³ Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Referred to in the body text as DI).

²¹⁴ Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Austin USA 1993 (Transl. and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist).

to a western reader. Nevertheless, there are many points of intersection with the thought of Ricoeur and Murdoch.

In his four essays collected under the title *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin develops his notion of the novel-genre's main characteristic, which is that a novel is fundamentally 'dialogic discourse'.²¹⁵ It is the terminology surrounding this characteristic that I shall present here. Let me first, however, state what dialogism is not: Bakhtin-scholar Caryl Emerson points out an important misunderstanding, which is that dialogism and intertextuality are the same thing. As Emerson says: "texts don't talk to each other, people do."²¹⁶ Dialogism is thus about voices (represented by text), and therefore about human beings in social interaction at one level or another. By his usage of the ear and hearing as root metaphors, Bakhtin casts light on what is actually quite a simple insight: polyphony, or "many voices", is a primary characteristic of human life reality, the reality in which dialogic discourse takes place.

Furthermore, and no longer so simply, a novel echoes and represents such a "noisy" reality. A polyphonic novel is filled with a multitude of (represented) voices. When an author writes a novel, his or her task is to "orchestrate" the voices into a "symphony". A reader must in turn be aware of this when interpreting a text, so as to avoid a reading in which he or she "transposes a symphonic (orchestrated) theme on to the piano keyboard" (DI:263). This, says Bakhtin, is the problem of much literary criticism. The particularity of the novel-genre as dialogic is not respected.

Bakhtin develops the images of polyphony and dialogue, and forms them into a literary theory by which he is able to explain and discuss how the multitude of voices stand in complex relations to each other. The dialogue-theory has many similarities to Ricoeur's hermeneutics, but where Ricoeur is more generally oriented, Bakhtin focuses more strongly on the concrete voices and their relation to text. One aspect of the complicated relations, which he pinpoints, concerns the situation that in a novel, voices are represented in text – and can therefore no longer be heard directly. This awareness of representation stands in the centre of Bakhtin's theory of the novel. Representation of reality (the actual spoken word) involves distinguishing

²¹⁵ The definitions are from the translators' glossary in *The Dialogic Imagination*: Dialogue: "A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes "dialogization" when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute." Discourse: "The Russian word *slovo* covers much more territory than its English equivalent, signifying both an individual word and a method of using words [c.f. the Greek *logos*] that presumes a type of authority." DI: 427.

²¹⁶ Emerson, Caryl: "Keeping the Self Intact During the Culture Wars: A Centennial Essay for Mikhail Bakhtin", in *New Literary History* 27.1 (1996), (p.107-126), p.111.

between re-citing and re-telling. Dialogic discourse in a novel does therefore not simply mean that the actual dialogues are reproduced (as in drama), but that all voices in the novel are artistically represented by means of authorial discourse in some way or another (DI:332). The author is not just a neutral channel for the communication of some content, but actively gives reality artistic form. This means that a reader must be aware of the indirect nature of representation. This is important, as inherent in any representation of words in a novel, there are at least two voices involved: the voice of the author, and the voice of the “other” (narrator, narratee or character). Therefore, if a novel is to be a novel, it is by its nature dialogic discourse. Further, the novel is characterized precisely by its distance to reality. There is no one-to-one relationship between literature and reality, the relation is more complex. In this, however, the mimetic representation of reality actually and paradoxically becomes more true to complex reality than direct discourse is and can be.

From such an understanding of artistic representation, it follows that narrative multi-voicedness (polyphony) is a primary characteristic of the modern novel as genre. Further, such polyphony will to some degree or other relativize and expand the meaning of any given textual representation of speech. This is because the representation is always accompanied by and juxtaposed to another voice. The dialogic novel cannot then be reduced to a single world view. It can never represent only the author’s world view, no more than it can represent only a narrator’s or a single character’s world view. Such ideological and formal diversity is the essential characteristic of the modern novel. Its formal wholeness is a wholeness of paradox. Its meaning lies beyond the dichotomies.

Dialogic discourse is in opposition to what Bakhtin calls *monologic discourse*, in which a whole text conveys a unity of meaning. Bakhtin argues that the monologic genres are epic, tragedy, poetry and myth. There may or may not be different actual voices present, but these nevertheless express a single (intended) world view. In monologic discourse, the voices present are not artistically represented. They are simply reproduced. There is no positioning of the author as “other” than the speaker, and therefore no internal dialogization. It is thus not so much the actual voices present, but the perspectivity they represent, which is characteristic of a dialogical situation or text.

Stepping aside from the close presentation of Bakhtin’s work, it is at this stage necessary to ask the following questions: what is then so important about dialogization? Why is it necessary to distinguish between dialogic and monologic discourse? From the point of view of ethics, it becomes particularly relevant to my question of authority: in what manner can a novel

be convincing with regard to moral language? What is the degree of truth-content in a novel, and what is characteristic of such truth? Questions like this lead on to a further aspect which Bakhtin discusses in his development of the theory of dialogic discourse, and concerns the authority of prose.

A certain kind of authoritative discourse is characterized by being monologic, not dialogic. Says Bakhtin: "It enters the artistic context as an alien body, there is no space to play in, no contradictory emotions – it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life, and the context around it dies, words dry up." (DI:344) His point is that in a novel, no truth-claims, convictions or (in the present case) conceptions of morality will develop successfully if there is a lack of interaction between different voices. This is not to say that such authoritative discourse necessarily is a negative thing. The point is to discern the value of another, different manner of authority, which the novel has. The alternative to such "external" authority in the novel is therefore what he calls "internally persuasive discourse".

At this stage of the argument, Bakhtin moves from descriptions of dialogic discourse, and of the novel in general, to a level of discussion where he reflects on the degree of persuasion a novel can induce when being read. Thus, the reader enters the theory of the process of meaning-making. I have already pointed out that for Bakhtin, the voice of the author is relevant, as well as the different voices within the text (i.e. narrators and characters). When the novel enters into the zone of a reader/interpreter, it becomes "dialogised" yet again. Bakhtin writes: "The ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others." (DI:341) An important aspect of moral authority at this level thus concerns the dialogic process, in which the reader actively partakes in the dialogue with the voices of author and those within a given novel. Internally persuasive discourse comes from (selective) interaction with other perspectives, not from passively being "exposed" to monologic discourse.

I shall leave the question of authority for the moment, and move to the semantic implications of understanding a novel as dialogic discourse. A prerequisite for understanding the impact of dialogic discourse from the point of view of semantics, is, according to Bakhtin, an understanding of the inherent double nature of language. Languages are both unitary (understandable to all who have learned the grammar and vocabulary) and individual (every person has an

individual usage of a given language).²¹⁷ By this Bakhtin means to point out that language itself – and thus the revelation of meaning – is in itself dialogic, and that the genre of the novel is where this is most clearly envisaged.²¹⁸ One could therefore say that a novel is a portrayal, or representation, of different languages in interaction with each other, and such interaction takes place at different levels. If we interpret our view of language as referring to the individual “mode”, a novel has no finite meaning, but is fundamentally open for interpretation. At the same time, the a reader must encounter the languages represented in the novel as fundamentally other, in the sense that there are certain meanings that are given in the representation. So, we have a dialogue going on also within the zone of the interpreter.

I have now attempted to show how Bakhtin argues first for the novel to be understood as the genre characterized by polyphony and dialogic discourse, and secondly, the way in which he lifts this theory to the level of the dialogic nature of language itself. His argument continues to the development of a concept that has close affinities to all the above, namely ‘heteroglossia’. This term has concrete application to literary analysis. First, Bakhtin defines it as follows: “Heteroglossia (...) is *another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.” (DI:324) The difference between the three terms polyphony, dialogue and heteroglossia is rather subtle, and I see it like this: heteroglossia is to polyphony what language is to voice. Here we approach the very complex implications of a dialogic understanding of reality’s diversity. The different voices inherent in a novel speak a multitude of languages, and therefore the heteroglossic nature of a novel thus serves as the basis for identifying this novel as dialogic discourse. Dialogic discourse concerns the meetings between different voices and languages, i.e. it concerns the relationships involved in speaking (and artistic representation of speech), and thus the movement back and forth between sameness and difference.

According to Bakhtin, there are two levels of heteroglossia to be aware of when analysing a novel. The first level concerns the heteroglossia involved in the different languages present in the relationship between the (real) author and narrators. According to Bakhtin, the novel is the form of art that most precisely echoes the dialogic reality of human life. The novel is mimetic – and is not in itself reality (he thus differs from a Derridaian understanding of reality as being “just” textual). The novel is an image, a representation of reality. However, at the same

²¹⁷ This is similar to Saussure’s distinction between ‘langue’ and ‘parole’, although the contexts in which the two theorists use this are different.

²¹⁸ This corresponds quite closely to Ricoeur’s “double gaze” regarding his view on universalism and contextualism.

time, it is *part* of the dialogic discourse. It is the task of the artist, or author, to render his or her representation of reality. This means that the author is “present” in the text, but simultaneously “other” to it. (Again, the notion of “sameness and difference”).

The second level of heteroglossia concerns the individual voices of the characters, and extensions of these. The character’s idiosyncrasies are symbolized by their voices, which distinguish them from each other. However, the differences between them are deeper than this. Bakhtin expresses this in what he calls “character zones”. Such a character zone is an area where “a dialogue is played out between the author and his characters” (DI:320). The zone of a character thus extends beyond the representation of voice. It is internally heteroglossic and therefore dialogic. It is important to note that a novel can represent not only spoken discourse, but also thoughts that lie around the spoken word. The novel, especially in the realm of character zones, can incorporate many perspectives by use of intertextual references, by applying various techniques of narration, by the use of historical facts woven into fiction (and vice versa), by the use of written (or “indirect voices”) in diaries, letters, poetry and other textual devices.

A further aspect of Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, concerns a concept which has not yet been mentioned, but which is one for which he is very well known, namely that of ‘carnival’. The importance of the carnivalistic motif concerns how distortions of reality are part of the dialogic process. Inversions of the familiar – by use of irony, humour, the burlesque and so forth – serve to juxtapose that which at first glance appears to be reality. I will now move on to how this concept can open up discussions on the paradoxical relation between appearance and reality in the novel, but shall return to it in context.

With this final comment on the presentation of Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse, I now turn to a short summary, clarification and discussion of what these two partners of dialogue bring to considering the problem of moral authority before turning to “Murdochian Models of Good and Evil”. This will, in tandem with the theories themselves, represent a preliminary and unfinalized discussion, which will in turn be refracted and relativized by the novel and voices we shall meet there.

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And now, with what I have so far established concerning Ricoeur, Bakhtin and moral authority, it is time to let Murdoch back into the conversation again, this time with a different voice from what we last heard.

11. Murdochian Models of Good and Evil

11.1. Murdoch as a Figurative Thinker

In order to recognize and analyze the literary and ethical implications of typical Murdochian imagery in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, it is necessary to present her conceptualization of frameworks for moral concepts such as evil and good.²¹⁹ Murdoch is at both deep and surface levels a visual thinker. It is important that this characteristic aspect of her work is recognized, and to understand its relevance for the studies of the characters – both as *types* and *individuals*. Murdoch's central arguments are often constructed by use of spatial and geometrical references, as well as colours, concrete images and metaphors.²²⁰ She seems to take this imaginative, visual nature of philosophy for granted:²²¹

In thinking about abstract matters one instinctively produces images, such as duty being a laser beam coming from above; an image which may itself elicit figurative rejoinders. Are not many duties more like an unchanging fall of shadows from a permanent light-source at ground level? (...) Philosophers are artists, and metaphysical ideas are aesthetic; they are intended to clarify and connect, and they certainly satisfy deep emotional needs. (MGM:36-7)

This is a technique (or mode of thinking), which transcends using images purely as examples or illustrations, although the illustrative effect certainly is present. It is important to my analysis that such figurative conceptualizations of ideas are recognizable in both her literary and philosophical texts. In the close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* I have already identified and discussed several examples of for instance cave-imagery, and light/darkness as symbols of the oscillation between appearance and reality. At this point I shall study more closely

²¹⁹ The texts I have studied most extensively with regard to visual imagery are the three essays in *The Sovereignty of Good*. It is in these that the themes we are studying ("Fire and Sun", "Ego and Unself", "Appearance and Reality") are most explicit, and developed the farthest as *images*. Figurative thinking and a visual approach to moral philosophy permeates her texts, in particular the later work. For instance, the essay "The Fire and the Sun. Why Plato Banished the Artists", in: Murdoch: *Existentialists and Mystics* (p.386-463) (referred to in the text as EM/FS) also makes much of the cave-myth, but does not bring much new to her discussions in the earlier essays. Figurative thinking and a visual approach to moral philosophy permeates her texts, in particular the later ones.

²²⁰ One of Murdoch's more extreme examples of visual expression, is to be found in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The following is a presentation of the content of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "We might here conjure up something like a picture by Blake, with the factual world spinning as a sort of glittering steel ball and the spirit of value silently circling around it. Or we see, in a reversal of the Platonic image, the limited factual whole together with encircling value appearing like an eclipse of the sun, with the dark object in the middle and the light round the edges. There is no light in the world: what obscures it is the whole of the world." (MGM:31).

²²¹ Her critique of other philosophers tends to suffer from this, as her analysis of others is not always transparent. She describes their philosophy figuratively, imposing her own images and thus not always being faithful to *their* logic. However, the idiosyncrasy of her constructive thought is nevertheless interesting and creative. To a large extent, I think it is possible to say that she generates new patterns of thought in her readers.

what these images correspond to, and/or represent in terms of the larger frameworks of Murdoch's philosophical thought, in which the images are to a certain extent developed and explained.

At this stage it is important to remember that neither Murdoch's philosophy nor her literary work has priority over the other. They represent variations in form of expression but "are two aspects of a single struggle" (SOG:41).²²² The visual conceptualizations of, for instance, morality, good and evil are such points of interaction. Although Murdoch insists that her novels and philosophy have little to do with each other, she explicitly emphasizes the necessity of art, or figurative form, as the appropriate language of ethics rather than that of science.²²³ "Philosophy in the past has played the game of science partly because it thought it was science. (...) Moral concepts do not move about *within* a hard world set up by science and logic. They set up, for different purposes, a different world." (SOG:27-8) According to Murdoch, the aim of moral philosophy is to provide critical reflection on how to "shed the ego" in order to achieve true vision in light of the good. Before I can proceed to an analysis of the images by which she develops this goal, it is important to understand the context of Murdoch's approach to philosophy, and in particular her idea of metaphysics:

In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly, and in the past sometimes has been, the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat. In this respect moral philosophy has shared some aims with religion. To say this is of course also to deny that moral philosophy should aim at being neutral. (SOG:52)

Understanding Murdochian philosophy begins with recognizing that for her, reality can and ought to be perceived visually – both in a metaphoric and literal sense. Says Murdoch: "Art gives a clear sense to many ideas which seem more puzzling when we meet with them elsewhere, and it is a clue to what happens elsewhere. An understanding of any art involves a recognition of hierarchy and authority." (SOG:88) Art can explain and clarify what science renders puzzling. This is the core of Murdoch's project, which is to establish a position in which metaphysics is to be seen as a "guide to morals". Her understanding of metaphysics is that it is "a form of critical reflection on reality and on the nature of human beings through the

²²² Murdoch discusses this theme thoroughly with Bryan Magee in a conversation broadcast on British television in 1977. The transcript serves as an introduction to *Existentialists and Mystics*. Magee, Bryan: "Literature and Philosophy". In: Murdoch: *Existentialists and Mystics*, (p.3-30).

²²³ This is a point also made by Maria Antonacchio, in the introduction to her philosophical monograph on Murdoch's philosophy. Antonacchio, Maria: *Picturing the Human. The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch*, New York 2000, (p.13). The title of this book gives credit to the visual nature of Murdoch's thought, which in my opinion often is under-examined in Murdoch criticism. In the following, there will therefore be several references to Antonacchio's work.

building of complex images, metaphors, and conceptual frameworks".²²⁴ Metaphysics is thus a construction of a certain perspective on reality which serves as a ground for interpretation and "right vision" of the real world. Ethical thinking and moral life can be understood as a dynamic interaction between a metaphysic framework and experienced reality.

Such a view is in opposition to the logical positivist tradition in which Murdoch was trained as a philosopher, in which all metaphysics is treated with great scepticism. She primarily challenges the positivist ideal of ethical neutrality, including the strong distinction between (objective) fact and value. Morality is, according to Murdoch, *not* the application of the will to a given reality, but the "imaginative construction" of reality guided by the idea of the good as a "magnetic centre" towards which one's attention is directed.²²⁵ Understanding therefore, in both art and ethics, involves disciplined vision towards that which is other than self, seen in the light of perfection. Metaphysics is "a figurative activity": myths, stories and conceptual schema are constructed in order to perceive the reality of moral existence and the self in relation to the good. The imaginative creativity of the artist, the "language" of metaphors and imagery in art, are thus teachers of ethics.

The goal of the present chapter is to clarify my own awareness of this dimension of the novel I am studying. It is also to show the relevance of vision as a point of interaction between aesthetic and philosophical form in the work of Murdoch. It is also typical of Murdoch that her conceptual frameworks are constructed around dual images and concepts. This is true of her novels too, as has become clear in the close reading. There I concluded by pointing out how several dual structures had emerged from the text, and could be used as "keys" to summarizing the analysis.²²⁶ The subtitles of the present chapter also reflect such a Murdochian duality, as they are all three structured around dyads.

²²⁴ Antonacchio: *Picturing the Human*, p.13. Antonacchio provides a precise presentation of Murdochian metaphysics in the introduction to the book, in which she clarifies some problems that can arise from the idiosyncratic style of Murdoch's terminology.

²²⁵ The image of "magnetism" is developed several places in Murdoch's work. One of the most interesting is in an analysis of Martin Buber's philosophy where she begins her argument by criticizing his understanding of Platonism. She writes, in relation to his work, that "For better or worse we look, we see something before we act. The Forms are magnetic, not just passively stared at, they enliven the energy of Eros in the soul and participate in the world, they are both transcendent and immanent." (MGM:461).

²²⁶ "Sameness and difference", "appearance and reality", "power and submission" and "vision and voice". Others are "type and individual", "self and other" and so forth. Not all of them are particularly original, but they are nevertheless interesting because of their interrelatedness. Seen together, the dyads form a complex mental structure which corresponds closely with Murdoch's philosophy in gen-

Further, the three themes by which I organize the following analysis have an internal unity in the sense that all three represent Murdoch's interpretation of human life as a "moral pilgrimage" from appearance to reality. The fundamental task of moral life is to discern the difference between what *seems* to be real and what truly *is* real (EM/FS:387). The progression of my presentation therefore begins with some comments on the most obviously figurative conceptualization of the pilgrimage from appearance to reality, namely Murdoch's interpretation of the famous Platonic myths from *The Republic*. Following this is a discussion of images of selfhood. This will primarily involve the "two selves" of which Murdoch speaks: the "bad" fantasy-self that is shrouded in consoling illusion ('the ego'), and the "good" true self ('un-self') who sees and perceives the world as it really is. Finally, I shall discuss the theme of movement between appearance and reality from a more general point of view, including at this stage Murdoch's understanding of evil. In this subchapter there are few new images as such. However, discussing the theme gives access to pointing out how fundamental the sense of right vision is in the framework of Murdochian ethics.

11.2. Fire and Sun

Plato's images of the cave and the sun never cease to be the central (sometimes somewhat excessive) metaphors by which Murdoch's work is imagined, developed and communicated.²²⁷ Her adoption of the Platonic images primarily concerns her understanding of the individual moral self: moral consciousness and psychology are to be understood in relation to the degree in which the individual focuses its attention to what is good. Thus, the cave-myth is fundamentally about the development of consciousness. It concerns the "stages of enlightenment" inherent in moral life, ideally understood:

Plato pictures the journeying soul as ascending through four stages of enlightenment, progressively discovering at each stage that what it was treating as realities were only shadows or images of something more real still. At the end of the quest it reaches a non-hypothetical first principle which is the form or idea of the Good, which enables it then to descend and retrace its path, but moving only through the forms or true conception of that which it previously understood only in part. (...) its general application to morality is fairly clear. The mind which has ascended to the vision of the Good can subsequently see the concepts through which it has ascended (art, work, nature, people, ideas, institutions, situations, etc., etc.) in their true nature and their proper relationships to each other. (SOG:94-5)

eral. Importantly, the dyads form a criss-crossing pattern, and thereby destabilize each other somewhat.

²²⁷ Concerning Plato's narrative from *The Republic*, I have found it best neither to define it as myth, image, metaphor, symbol nor allegory. The categories are of course quite different, but at this stage the thickness of meaning which comes from a looser identification helps us to grasp its structure and impact at several different levels.

Murdoch perceives this moral pilgrimage as *movement in a landscape*. The primary metaphors are of space and light, which are consistently present in her philosophical thought. “Light and obscurity”, “nearness and distance”, “into and out of” and other dualistic space-light couplings like these are often used in her texts. However, these metaphors are more than purely illuminative illustrations. They are fundamentally part of “the metaphysics of morals”, which is the imaginative construction of structures by which reality can be perceived.

The following short quotation more or less represents the sum of Murdoch’s thought: “When Plato wants to explain Good he uses the image of the sun. The moral pilgrim emerges from the cave and begins to see the real world in the light of the sun, and last of all is able to look at the sun itself.” (SOG:92) This quotation thematises the relation between the good and the individual, sums up what the moral pilgrimage involves, and represents a distinction between two aspects of the sun as metaphor for good. Of primary importance here is first, that the light from the sun illuminates the real world, and secondly, that the sun itself provides this light. As Murdoch points out: “[The sun] is a different kind of thing from what it illuminates.” (SOG:92) Maria Antonacchio draws an interesting conclusion from this distinction – which reoccurs often in Murdoch’s texts. She points out that the aspect of good which corresponds to the illuminative function that the sun has, corresponds to Murdoch’s concept of the transcendent good. The sun *itself* as image of the good, corresponds to “the idea of perfection”.²²⁸ Thus, she enables to distinguish between two aspects of good which are important to, but easily confused, in Murdoch’s own texts. Says Antonacchio:

The transcendental aspect of the good represents the condition for the possibility of knowledge; the good as ideal standard represents the distant goal of perfection which is implicit in all human activities. Put differently, the transcendental aspect of the good emphasizes the internal relation of the good to human life (“all our life proves it”); whereas the good as ideal standard emphasizes the objectivity of the good, its distance from the desire and will of the agent (“it’s terribly distant, farther than any star”). These two features represents in conceptual terms something that Murdoch often describes in spatial terms. (...) Human life is, as it were, stretched between these two poles.²²⁹

Antonacchio’s point above concerning the sun, that human life is stretched between the two poles of good as internal to human activity (reality as it is seen in the light of the good) at one pole, and good as a distant ideal at the other. It is also relevant to the narrative of the cave myth. This story develops further the framework of the continuum established above. However, from this point of view, transcendence as “a pole” might not be the most apt metaphor.

²²⁸ Antonacchio: *Picturing the Human*, p.52.

²²⁹ Same book, p.52.

This is because it is too static. It does not quite convey the dynamic aspect of the different *degrees* in which the relation between the good and human life is actualized. The pole of transcendence as such is artistically represented by the *whole* cave, and must include the process of the individual consciousness towards “piercing the veil of illusion”, as it gradually moves through stages of enlightenment from the darkness and shadows in the depth of the cave, towards being able to get out of the cave and finally (ideally) be able to “face the sun”.

As I attempted to make clear in the close reading, this relation between “illusion” (the world of the cave), “reality” (the real world outside the cave) and “ultimate reality” (the sun itself) often has symbolic presence in Murdoch’s novels. Thus, the literary texts inherently take part in her “imaginative construction” of a metaphysic of morals. The characters move in landscapes which are clearly representative of the conceptual space-light framework. Cellars and confined rooms are caves, and “good” characters face the sun at crucial moments. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* ends with Julius in Paris with the sun behind him. There are also several obvious examples of symbolic movement in this landscape. The fighting scene in the Chinese restaurant in a basement at the end of the novel’s Part I is significant with respect to Tallis’s story. Morgan in the London Underground is classic with respect to its “cave-ness”, and its images of ascent and descent. Simon’s dream of the pigeon-holes also echoes the movement of the moral pilgrim.

Belonging to the figuration of the pilgrimage from the cave towards the real world in the light of the sun, are the very physical images of journeying, reorientation, ascending and descending: “The sun is seen at the end of a long quest which involves a reorientation (the prisoners have to turn round) and an ascent.” (SOG:92) Reorientation leads to new insight – one sees the world differently. The idea of *metanoia* represents a turning away from illusion, a movement towards true insight in what is real. Such turning points are often present in the novels, and usually easily identifiable. They often take the form of a symbolic death, in which the self is transcended and its perspective changes: “The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves.” (SOG:103) Thus the character is enabled to see what is *other* to him- or herself. The images of ‘unselfing’ (to which I shall return shortly) and ‘reorientation’ have much in common as metaphors.

However, it is important that the symbolic deaths, or reorientations in the novels, are hardly ever final. For instance, in Morgan’s story there are many reorientations, not all of them leading to new and true insight – although Morgan again and again professes to having found the

truth about herself and love and life. Her story shows that although Murdoch's model for moral development is present as an ideal, it is never simple in real life. All moral development is "appearance". To comprehend true reality, the good, is an ideal end which is impossible for the individual to achieve. This too can be understood in light of the cave-myth, and the fire as symbol is the key to this. Reorientation happens at several levels in the myth, the first being when the pilgrim turns away from the wall and sees the fire. This marks the beginning of a journey, but the fire is still an illusive reality. The traveller must pass the fire, and this movement of ascent is slow and difficult. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the character Morgan is the representative of humanity. Her story is about never really being able to pass the fire. She – as is humanity – is caught in the cave of illusion. There are only small glimpses of hope, a few subtle indications that she is heading in the right direction, moving in an ascent towards the real world outside the cave.

The ascent towards the sun is a geometrical and physical image. It is developed further as an idea by its opposite movement, namely that of descent, the movement of return to the cave. The movement of descent is an important aspect of the myth of the cave:

Plato sometimes seems to imply that the road towards the Good leads away from the world of particularity and detail. However, he speaks of a descending as well as an ascending dialectic and he speaks of a return to the cave. In any case, 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. False conceptions are often generalized, stereotyped and unconnected. (SOG:96)

The traveller, having seen the sun, turns round again and descends back into the cave. This journey does not lead back into illusion, but involves a changed self who sees the inside of the cave in a different light. This individual understands the ambivalence of unity versus particularity and detail, and does not impose unity where there is none. Says Murdoch: "In its light we see the things of the world in their true relationships." (SOG:92) The pilgrim sees the wall, the puppets, the fire, and the other prisoners of the cave for what they are. Thus, the movement of the "good" person does not necessarily mean that he or she always moves towards the sun, but that the knowledge of the real world has become internalized when apprehending the real world. The pilgrim has achieved deep insight into goodness and reality, and sees the insight of the cave not in the light from the sun itself, but from the experience of what the real world is like.

That the pilgrim is enabled to see truth in the cave with the "right" moral vision comes from having internalized the experience of seeing all in its true guise. Having seen reality in the light of the good, this cannot be "unlearned". The enlightened knowledge has become part of

the consciousness of the individual. Finally, and not least, the *dialectic* of the movements of ascent and descent are fundamentally important. Murdoch's frameworks for the perception of reality involve grasping both unity and complexity in a right relation to each other. This is the task of the discerning individual, or the virtuous person.

A lower stage of enlightenment is – as was a point made with reference to both Morgan and Simon's stories – symbolized by insight from the light of the fire, the source of imperfect vision. However, one can see more in the light of the fire than with no fire. This is an important part of Murdoch's metaphysic structure. She sees the individual consciousness along a continuum with an impossible ideal end-point. Nevertheless, there are "degrees" of morality. True reality is impossible to see although the moral pilgrim can be farther from or closer to seeing things as they really are, in their "true relationships". These degrees of enlightenment correspond to gradually becoming free from illusion, from being consoled by "false suns" – in particular the false light of the ego. Worshiping the "fat, relentless ego" is the basis of immorality. Human beings cannot face what Murdoch sees as the truth about life: that it is pointless and contingent. We create our own illusions that we worship, she says, and we are unwilling to give up these consolations. It is therefore immensely difficult to ascend from the cave:

The impulse to worship is deep and ambiguous and old. There are false suns, easier to gaze upon and far more comforting than the true one. (...) Plato has given us the image of this deluded worship in his great allegory. The prisoners in the cave at first face the back wall. Behind them a fire is burning in the light of which they can see upon the wall the shadows of puppets which are carried between them and the fire and they take these shadows to be the whole of reality. When they turn round they can see the fire, which they have to pass in order to get out of the cave. The fire, I take it, represents the self, the old regenerate psyche, that great source of energy and warmth. The prisoners in the second stage of enlightenment have gained the kind of self-awareness which is nowadays a matter of such interest to us. They can see in themselves the sources of what was formerly blind selfish instinct. They see the flames which threw the shadows which they used to think were real, and they can see the puppets, imitations of things in the real world, whose shadows they used to recognize. They do not yet dream that there is anything else to see. What is more likely than that they should settle down beside the fire, which though its form is flickering and unclear is quite easy to look at and cosy to sit by? (SOG:100f)

This passage, in which Murdoch clearly brings the self, the psyche, into her interpretation of the allegory of the cave, leads us on to the next point. Here I shall concentrate on images of the relation between the ego and the true self. We have seen that the fire represents the ego, the false self, that from which the moral self must be "unselfed". It represents the cosy illusion from which the moral pilgrim must shed. The light which the fire casts does not show reality as it truly is, and it is the task for the moral person to shed this ego, to see not self, but 'unself'.

11.3. Ego and Unself

What then, are the implications of the points made above for understanding Murdoch's view of the individual's ideal moral development as developing its "attention to reality"? It is important to show how the self is visualized as physically moving around *within and in relation to spatial images*. Human life reality is represented in spatial form. The 'ego' and the 'unself' are images of different psychological *attitudes*, or modes of vision, with respect to the same reality. One image represents the human who cannot face the truth of limitedness and confinement and consoles her- or himself with a fantasy of false freedom. The other image represents the attitude of the person who *truly sees*, accepting what Murdoch sees as the confinement, the contingency and pointlessness of life. Thus, the moral pilgrimage from appearances (ego) to reality (the un-selfed self) is not to be understood as a simple escapism from the confinement of this world (ascent from the cave), but as a process of refining one's perception. Development of moral consciousness consists of *learning to see* (and interpret) this "space" correctly. This has already been exemplified in the cave-myth, in the movement of return, the descent back into the cave in which the individual is enabled to see and perceive reality as it is.

All just vision (...) is a moral matter. The same virtues, in the end the same virtue (love), are required throughout, and fantasy (self) can prevent us from seeing a blade of grass just as it can prevent us from seeing another person. An increasing awareness of 'goods' and the attempt (usually only partially successful) to attend to them purely, without self, brings with it an increasing awareness of the unity and interdependence of the moral world. (SOG:70)

I mentioned earlier that Murdoch poses two alternative uses of the creative imagination. These represent different attitudes to vision, and can be repeated in the present context: *fantasy* is the construction of false images, and is a static and inward form of consolation in the face of pointlessness and mortality. *Imagination* is creative and dynamic. It is vision directed towards what is other than self, and thereby transforms what we see: "We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it, and this exhilarates us because of the distance between our ordinary dulled consciousness and an apprehension of the real." (SOG:90) Again, unselfing does not involve *escaping* selfhood, but is to see beyond self to what is other.

Murdoch's idea of the suppressed self as an ideal is not altogether unproblematic. She is not clear as to what the (good) self actually *is*. Her tendency is to speak negatively of the self (conflating it with the ego), but nevertheless seems to presuppose the existence of a true and substantial self (at least as an ideal). What this self is, is certainly underdeveloped in Murdoch's thought. It is, however, possible to say that within her moral psychology and ethical

theoretical framework, the “true self” is the virtuous self. The virtuous self sees the other in the light of love, justice, mercy and compassion. Thus, the substance of the self is only a possibility insofar as just, loving vision is achieved. Significantly, vision is the primary human capacity in Murdoch’s moral psychology. This also corresponds to her metaphysics, which – as should now be familiar – involves constructing images, myths and figurative frameworks in order to perceive and critically reflect on reality as it is.

At this point it is necessary to return to Murdoch’s anthropology. The following passage provides images of her assumptions concerning the situation of the human being:

I assume that human beings are naturally selfish and that human life has no external point or *telos*. 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. (...) The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking for 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 which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less frantic reverie 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. (SOG:78f)

Murdoch identifies the self with the psyche, and uses the image of a machine to develop her position. It does not hold very far as a symbol, and Murdoch only uses it to point out two likenesses. These, however, are significant: one is that a machine needs a source of energy. The drive to protect the ego from pain provides the primary energy for the psyche, Murdoch says, and is therefore very hard to overcome. The other is that a machine is caught in patterns it has no control over, i.e. it is not *free*. The machine image is identifiable in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. There are several instances in which human beings are compared to machines. These passages can benefit from a reading in which the relation between the ego and the unself is clarified.

The central issue in this case concerns the ego’s lack of freedom. It is predisposed to “certain patterns of activity”. The unself on the other hand is free, but what does this mean? The concept of freedom is important in Murdochian anthropology. “Freedom (...) is not an inconsequential chucking of one’s weight about, it is the disciplined overcoming of self.” (SOG:95) This conception of freedom is in opposition to a contemporary “negative” definition of freedom, understood as freedom from that which restrains the self. For Murdoch, freedom for the self is positively defined, and is fundamentally related to moral vision. Freedom consists of being free from consoling fantasy which positively implies that the self is (ideally) able to see

truth (i.e. reality) – and consequentially, to “overcome the self”. Freedom is thus not being free from hindrances that make certain choices impossible, as all modern conceptions of autonomy and voluntarism fundamentally suppose, but being *free to see clearly*. Murdoch uses the images of glass and cloudiness as symbols of the different degrees of moral vision. Ultimately, then, the free individual is someone whose consciousness is transparent. The unfree individual is someone who cannot see clearly, who has yet to “pierce the veil of consolation”, or to lose the “cloud of frantic reverie” that impairs her or his vision.

In the passage above is also the core of Murdoch’s argument against religion. She is positive towards several aspects of Christian morality, and bases her project in part on finding an alternative “guide to morals” to – as she says – “fill a hole” in a situation where she emphatically states that “God is dead”. However, she ultimately sees religion as posing a grave danger with respect to the moral development a human being should aspire to. For her, theology is nothing but a “consoling fiction”. For instance, Murdoch insists that the image of the suffering Christ, which is central to Christianity, is a comforting image. The image of purgatory too, evokes the fantasy that suffering can be meaningful: “To buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of good: what could be more satisfying, or as a romantic might say, more thrilling? Indeed the central image of Christianity lends itself to just this illegitimate transformation.” (SOG:82) For Murdoch, the opposite is true. Life is pointless, and so is suffering. Not to accept this is a grandiose fantasy, and the source of selfishness and evil action. In the light of such a position, her fascination for Buddhism becomes clear. Salvation is annihilation. Nirvana represents the ultimate “unselfing”. Thus, the image of the good man, the “unself”, is in fact to be understood as a form of nothingness. This is a significant aspect of the story of the good man Tallis.

Noticeable in the passage above is also an interesting contrast between “conflated images of the self” on the one hand, and “theological fictions” on the other. This would seem to imply that we have here to do with two different fantasies – in which the ideal humility of the Christian is just as false as the inflated ego. “Humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, it is selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of all virtues.” (SOG:95) This is an important distinction in Murdoch’s understanding of the self. (I have, in fact, touched upon the symbol of inaudibility in Simon’s story, in which his humility is shown to be a consolation.) Although it can be argued that her conception of theological anthropology is far too thin, there is no doubt that such self-effacing humility *has been* held as an ideal in Christianity throughout history. However, the point here

is to understand what kind of things Murdoch sees as fantasy. The implications of her view that religion is consolation in the face of death and pointlessness, enables a better understanding of the character Leonard, who represents a dying and disillusioned God the Father. Thereby Tallis's story (as transfiguration of Christ) also benefits from this perspective, concerning his "piercing of the veil of consolation" when he must face the death of his father.

In the next passage a further aspect of the spatial nature of her construction is obvious. The notion of *direction* is important here. Thus, Murdoch understands the direction of attention to the real as outward, in contrast to attention that is focused "in" toward the self:

It is not simply that suppression of self is required before accurate vision can be obtained. The great artist sees his objects (and this is true whether they are sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil) in the light of justice and mercy. The direction of attention is, contrary to nature, outward, away from self which reduces all to false unity, towards the great surprising variety of the world, and the ability so to direct attention is love. (SOG:66)

The implication here is that there is a self who sees. The problem here is *how* the self sees. This leads back to the concept of virtue. Virtue is more than just suppression of the self: the attention must be *directed elsewhere*, qualified by certain standards. The relation between self and good is dependent on certain inner capacities, a certain consciousness. This consciousness is virtue (love, justice and mercy). The task of becoming virtuous is difficult, and connected to vision: "Where virtue is concerned we often apprehend more than we clearly understand and grow by looking." (SOG:31) Virtue is the acquired ability to direct one's attention to reality, and to see in the light of the good. Self is therefore not true selfhood if it is not attuned to what is good.

We see differences, we sense directions, and know that the Good is still somewhere beyond. The self, the place where we live, is a place of illusion. Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness. (...) 'Good is a transcendent reality' means that virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is. It is an empirical fact about human nature that this attempt cannot be entirely successful. (SOG:93)

The essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* conclude with the impossibility of becoming moral. Thus, the grand ideal scheme is reduced by the empirical experience of what it means to be human. "The self is a divided thing and the whole of it cannot be redeemed any more than it can be known. And if we look outside the self what we see are scattered imitations of Good." (SOG:99) The notion that "what we see are scattered imitations" leads us to the final subchapter, in which there are a few more comments to be made about the duality of appearance and reality.

11.4. Appearance and Reality

As should now have become clear, the spatial and aesthetic nature of Murdoch's thinking permeates all levels of her philosophy (and literature): "Of course we 'move through life', as upon a 'road', but are required to see our way. Speaking of morality in terms of cognition, the imagery of vision, which is everywhere in our speech, seems natural." (MGM:462) It should now have become clear that the dialectic of appearance versus reality belongs primarily within a visually perceived spatial metaphor. This "space" is recognizable as a structure by which to interpret Murdoch's novels. Further, if the good and the real are closely connected (which they are, according to Murdoch), and these are ideal end-points, this means that all human experience represents degrees of appearance. Reality is elusive, but the effort to *see* is necessary and gives results.

I have spoken of efforts of attention directed upon individuals and of obedience to reality as an exercise of love, and have suggested that 'reality' and 'individual' present themselves to us in moral contexts as ideal end-points or Ideas of Reason. This surely is the place where the concept of good lives. 'Good': 'Real': 'Love'. These words are closely connected. (...) If apprehension of good is apprehension of the individual and the real, then good partakes of the infinite elusive character of reality. (SOG:42)

It is typical of critics that they more or less consciously adopt visual and spatial metaphors in their analysis of Murdoch. For instance, Peter Conradi uses *perception* as a key concept to explain the telos of the moral pilgrim, thus accentuating the visual nature of Murdoch's moral philosophy: "What awaits the moral pilgrim for Murdoch is not some attenuated elsewhere, but 'here' differently and freshly perceived".²³⁰ He also speaks of this telos in spatial terminology (elsewhere versus here). The physical room of the cave never ceases to be the root metaphor for the space within which we as moral agents see and move. This room, or road, however, is ambiguous. It can represent the self's consciousness as caught in "appearance" and it can represent the agent's true and humble acceptance of the reality of humanity as finite and pointless. The point of ambivalence belongs to the Platonic dual image of ascent and descent in relation the cave, of movement *in space*. Further, it underscores the point made in extension to the more common virtue- and narrative-ethical conceptions of moral character as a construction *in time*.

Last, but not least, an important issue concerning the complex of appearance versus reality has yet to be thematised. This issue is presupposed in the title of the present chapter, which is "Murdochian Models of Good and Evil". However, in the light of what I have written so far

²³⁰ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.108.

this heading might seem misleading, as the focus has solely been on models of good. What about models of evil? How is evil visualised in Murdoch's metaphysics? To the extent that evil has been thematised in the past chapter, it has been as *negation*. The subtext has been that the direction of evil lies as far from the idea of perfection as it is possible to be. A hasty conclusion on the basis of what has been written could therefore be that if good is ultimate reality, then evil must be understood as a form of nothingness. And how can one provide figurative images of nothing?

However, it is important to understand what this nothingness actually *means*. If the good and the real belong as inherently together as they do in Murdoch's philosophy, then evil is "unreality" or misguided perception. This is reminiscent of an Augustinian idea of evil as absence or chaos, although it is not quite the same. Murdochian evil is more a negation of true vision than ontological nothingness. It is the self encumbered in and by itself. Evil and egoism thus belong to the same negative conceptual structure. The Murdochian metaphysic framework includes evil in the sense that it is the "end-point" of appearance, the ultimate fantasy. Egoism is not a fault of "being". It does not as such belong to the human condition which one could say is central to the traditional Christian understanding of original sin. Egoism and evil are problems concerning moral consciousness, not will. It would be therefore misguided to say that the immanent world is evil, whereas the transcendent is good. Murdoch argues this case negatively, discussing Buber in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. She is explicit in her critique of him in what she sees as a very usual misinterpretation of Plato. Buber's problem with Plato is, according to Murdoch, that "...influenced by Plato, European philosophy has tended to picture spirituality as a looking upwards, rather than as a movement of making contact here below." (MGM:461) It is how one perceives the world which is the criterion for moral judgement and authority. The good does not have authority in an external sense, as being "over" the messy jumble of life. Its authority lies in the light it casts, in the possibility for re-orientation in relation to what one sees, what one pays attention to – namely the other, not self.

The theme of nothingness, however, has been treated elsewhere in this chapter, in a completely different context. The 'unself' (at least in part) represents a sort of ideal of nothingness, or annihilation of self. How then, can "nothingness" represent both good and evil? Obviously, the argument might be made that the concept is inadequate, or not sharp enough. Nevertheless, this is a relevant problem with regard to the literary analysis. In the close reading, I showed how the stories of Tallis and Julius – and to a certain extent Morgan's too, all

include the motif of nothingness, non-being or death at some point. Tallis in his dreams and the stream-of-consciousness sequences, Julius in the swimming pool and Morgan in the Underground are all examples of this very ambiguous leitmotif. How can we relate to this? Murdoch's own work provides little help towards seeking transparency concerning this problem. The "cloudiness" and opacity of her symbolism is both frustrating and intriguing, but must not be ignored or seen to disqualify her work. There is an important point to be made concerning the symbols by which we seek meaning and understanding, which is that we cannot see clearly. Literature, or art in general, can help to clarify meaning. But ultimately art, however good it is, will never escape being appearance (form). It is never reality (formlessness).

Although I could stop here, and leave the argument, accepting the ambiguity of Murdochian symbolism, I shall turn to Ricoeur, who develops an interesting idea with respect to the present problem in his book *The Symbolism of Evil*. In a complex argument (which I dramatically simplify here), he identifies two metaphoric structures ("schemas of evil") which underlie traditional conceptualizations of sin.²³¹ These are *defilement* on the one hand, in which salvation represents a cleansing of the stain. Evil, or sin, is here understood as a positive state in which its opposite, salvation, is "nothingness". That which is good, is defined negatively. On the other hand, Ricoeur identifies a second substructure. This has its root in the Judaic tradition, in which sin is understood as the breached Covenant with God. In other words, evil, or sin, is a *broken relationship*. A rebuilding of this relationship from brokenness to wholeness is necessary. Here, sin is "nothingness" (a negative) while salvation is restitution (a positive). This multifaceted understanding, which is recognizable in Murdoch's work, serves as a background to later discussions.

To return to the primary discussion of Murdochian models of evil, the literary critic David Gordon writes about Murdoch: "the fundamental evil for her is always human vanity, not human will".²³² The links between vanity, egoism and evil is important and should by now have become clear, and the motif of vanity is fundamental to an interpretation of Julius, who is vanity personified. It is important to recognize that Murdoch speaks much less of evil than she does of good. The fact that it has so little space in her metaphysic structure signifies an understanding of evil as "other" to what is good. This needs to be qualified: evil is not an *opposite* to good in the sense that it represents a different pole, or that they stand in a dichotomic rela-

²³¹ Ricoeur, Paul: *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston USA 1969. The argument runs through the whole book, but the particular point I make here is found in the chapters called "The Symbolism of Sin: Sin as Nothingness", (p.70-81) and "The Symbolism of Sin: Sin as Positive", (p.82-99).

²³² Gordon, David J.: *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing*, Columbia USA 1995, p.61.

tion to each other. Evil is not an inverted “ideal end point”. Evil is the *perversion* of good. It is misunderstanding. It is wrong vision and false consciousness. Thus, the fundamental structure of appearance versus reality which has dominated throughout this analysis of Murdochian metaphysics, is also a structure, or model for the relation between evil and good.

11.5. The Interplay of Genres: Philosophy, Literature and Art

In this chapter I have focused on Murdoch’s metaphysics, her philosophical discussion of and use of images, models and metaphors concerning moral consciousness and concepts. So, it is with her figurative models of good and its “other” in hand that I return to the analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It is necessary to remember that the novel is not an exemplification of Murdoch’s philosophy. The above presentation does not have status as a provider of sources for a *normative* reading of the novel. Such a claim would mean that the novel’s persuasive authority is purely external, whereas it is important to me that the philosophical perspectives enter into a dialogue with the novel. They are not to be imposed onto the novel as the “truth”. The aim in this chapter has been to highlight some of the larger themes and structures from which an analysis of certain elements in the novel text can benefit. But the relation between similar frameworks, structures and visual images in the two genres is not a simple, but a dynamic and sometimes paradoxical relation. An awareness of the dangers of assuming too much coherence is important, yet a reading in which the two genres can serve to comment on each other can certainly generate some fruitful insights.

In this context of visual structures and meaning transcending genres, it is also relevant to bring in a third genre, and point to the role specific works of art have in Murdoch’s texts. Visual art serves as a means of juxtaposing the philosophical and literary texts in a manner by which the perspective is external to them both. The paintings enter into dialogue with the written text. One of the central images in Murdochian “iconography” is the myth of Apollo and Marsyas as painted by Titian in *The Flaying of Marsyas*.²³³

The painting is referred to several times in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and echoes a central theme of the novel as well as the dialectic of appearance and reality and the shedding of the ego which are important in Murdoch’s philosophy. The textual references to real works of art help to remind us that neither philosophy, nor literature, nor the two of them, provide all answers. There will always be yet a different perspective, always another way of seeing something. This does not mean that we cannot attempt to articulate what we believe to be true, or

²³³ Her portrait in the National Portrait Gallery has this painting by Titian as its background image!

to hold some answers to be “truer” than others. However, visual art provides a necessary reminder of the bodyliness of humanity, the material aspect of being a person. We are not only consciousness and intellect. Blood, flesh, colour and texture are part of the reality which Murdoch implores us to pay attention to.

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I have now provided a comprehensive introduction to a central aspect of Murdoch’s philosophy, namely the visual nature of her imagination and thought. In particular, I have shown that Platonic imagery is deeply engrained in her work. I have not, however, discussed her work (nor that of Ricoeur or Bakhtin) with specific reference to the problem of moral authority. Therefore, I turn to this now.

12. What The Philosophical Voices Have Said

12.1. Part IV in Profile

As a summarizing conclusion to the literary voices of Part III, I identified four themes which were internally dialectic, and which all surfaced during the close reading. With them, I could gather together several of the most important thematic threads of the novel, namely issues concerning *Sameness and Difference*, *Appearance and Reality*, *Power and Submission* and *Vision and Voice*. Some of these have reoccurred more or less explicitly in the former chapters, as I hope to have made clear. They therefore serve as an important background for the present section, in which the time has come to clarify what the Ricoeurian, Bakhtinian (and Murdochian) perspectives have supplied to a further development of the problem of moral authority.²³⁴

First of all, at a macro-hermeneutic level, there are many structural similarities between the way Ricoeur builds his hermeneutics on the premises of *reflexivity and relationality*, Bakhtin’s use of *representation and dialogue* as similar corner-stones, and Murdoch’s attention to *perspectivism and interplay of genre*. All the approaches involve a “split” awareness. Reflexivity splits the ‘self’, and the ‘I’ and ‘self’ and ‘other’. Representation splits ‘reality’ and ‘text’, and the different languages of genre serve as “other” to each other. Thus, these three

²³⁴ Yet again, I shall repeat the working definition of moral authority: 1) *The substantial content of a moral concept of which one on a wide basis can be convinced is true*, and 2) *which motivates and empowers the moral agent to act in accordance with it*.

contributions can all lead to the development of deeply pluralistic theories, in the sense developed in Chapter 5. This was, as I discussed then, a way of relating to difference not necessarily as dichotomic, but including the possibility of incommensurability. An implication of such pluralism is that different degrees of relativization are inherently present in the cognitive structure. (I also touched upon this under the heading of *Sameness and Difference* in Part III.) This is important with respect to the first aspect of the definition above, regarding the way in which we can think about the substantial truth-content of a moral concept. Such “split awareness” is thus a condition for internal authority of the kind I wish to develop.

For Ricoeur, moral concepts can only have authority (i.e. held to be true) as a result of a hermeneutic of detour: by their development through interaction between interpretations of experiences, texts and culture. I have found in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics what I see as a fruitful attempt to provide an alternative structure of ethical thought, both to philosophies of the cogito (represented by Descartes) and “their overthrow” (represented by Nietzsche) (OA:4). This is particularly relevant as a means of placing the scope of my own dissertation in a context which challenges approaches to subjectivity, meaning-making and ethics in the following three traditions: a modern (Cartesian) tradition, a nihilistic (deconstructivist) tradition, as well as to certain brands of narrativist thought.

In Bakhtin’s theory, the metaphor (and reality) of dialogue between different voices corresponds to the network-image of authority which was introduced in Chapter 2. His concept of monologic discourse and, corresponding to this, external authority, parallels a hierarchical image of authority. His discussion on the semantic aspects of dialogic discourse also contributes to this: the meaning of language must be developed *dialogically* in order to be authoritative. Further, Bakhtin’s distinction between interpreting a novel as “orchestrated” rather than, as it were, a single tune on a piano keyboard, corresponds to the distinction between *thickness* and *thinness* of moral concepts. He thus provides an argument for seeing the novel as a place to study aspects of what substantial content and internal authority can mean.

For Murdoch, the difficulty of seeing clearly, to distinguish between *Appearance and Reality*, brings about an ambivalence to what we can hold to be good and true. It is an aspect of human life and love that we see ourselves before the other, and therefore must be wary of our convictions. It is the task of the “moral pilgrim” to see the other in the light of the good (the sun). However, the good does not have a formal, given status. It cannot be “imposed” on reality. It is like a magnetic centre towards which we must discipline our attention. This, in effect, means paying attention to the needs and true reality of other, and not consoling oneself with

given definitions of what is good. Thus, Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch all contribute to substantial rather than formal understandings of “the truth” about moral concepts.

An argument for studying the problem of moral authority in literary text is provided by Ricoeur, in particular with respect to his narrative anthropology. In his hermeneutic anthropology, narrative is seen as the fundamental way to speak about the relation between poles of split awareness. Narrative as conceptual structure is a way of covering the complex, ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the “middle ground”, the field of energy between the poles of the electric battery, so to speak. Stories are thus metaphors that can (although not necessarily) open up an understanding of the relational structure of authority. The correspondence with the network-image of authority in contrast with a hierarchical one can be identified here, in the sense that stories are in themselves networks of meaning, voices interacting and are thus reflexivity given form. And, with the first aspect of the definition of moral authority in mind, we see how the stories of our own lives and interaction with other stories can contribute to understanding and developing internal authority. They provide a context (a place, a form and a language) for speaking about authoritative (but never absolute) convictions concerning the “truth” of concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

This leads on to the second aspect of the working definition of moral authority, namely that of agency. The self (interpreted as narrative) cannot be seen as decontextualized. Selfhood is necessarily part of praxis, it does not exist *a-topos*. In this lies the link between selfhood and conviction on the one hand, and agency, or action, on the other. Selfhood cannot be understood without relating to the self’s “power to act”. In other words, this is where we truly can begin to speak of ethics as integration of conviction and action – for which the idea of ‘character’ is of fundamental importance. Character understood as narrative also provides a meaningful connection between the descriptive and prescriptive perspectives of ethics, and the contextual and the universal, thus dissolving such dichotomies while paying attention to the complexity of moral life. The juxtaposition and interplay between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity serves as a means of distinguishing important aspects of the interpretation of the singular characters in the novels. In addition, the relation of self and other in dialogic and hermeneutic relation (i.e. the relationships between the characters) serves as an interpretational help to my analysis.

Returning to the first aspect of the definition (which belongs inherently together with the second), action is important to the “degree of truth” by which we hold moral concepts to be authoritative. Ricoeur’s idea of ‘attestation’ corresponds to that which expresses authority in the

internal sense. Truth is “attested” not by external authority (“I believe that”), but by internal authority (“I believe in”). To believe in, to be convinced by the truth of ‘good’ or ‘evil’, is fundamentally linked to action. Attestation (hermeneutic truth) therefore involves that one acts upon one’s convictions. Agent and action cannot be separated in hermeneutics.

Finally, the concept of dialogic discourse is an excellent tool when approaching novels given the complexity and ambiguity that narratives can provide. The English novelist and literary critic David Lodge points out that “the impossibility of arriving at a single, simple version of the ‘truth’ about any human action or experience is, in the broadest sense, what fiction is about.”²³⁵ This is all the more interesting if one sees, as I do, the novel as a form of mimetic representation of reality. To rephrase: fiction is about not arriving at monologic, or simple, static truths about human life reality (meaning and action). Nor is ethics. The authority of a novel is of a different kind than what can be found in certain varieties of philosophical and theological texts. So is moral authority. Bakhtin’s terminology thus presents a set of tools by which to identify voices at different levels, and understand some of the implications of such polyphony for contemporary ethical discourse. To verbalise my readings of Murdoch’s novels provides some means of understanding, and speaking about, the web of intersubjective relationships any moral subject is part of, and further: the manner in which moral concepts have authority.

12.2. Towards New Horizons

On the basis of the close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and the extension of partners in dialogue, I now have substantial material to discuss implications for ethical theoretical reflection of this un-final and diversified construction. Is it possible to transfer to moral discourse what I have studied in its literary form, namely moral concepts and configurations of morality by way of their representations (incarnations) of ‘good’, ‘evil’ and ‘the human soul’? If so, how? My thesis is that the literary exploration of characters interpreted as internally dialogized (“oneself as another”) in relation to external voices (the “other”) who enter such internal dialogue, provides a deeper understanding of what moral language can mean in all its ambiguity – and, in continuation of this: that the true authority of moral language is tested in its relation to action. ‘Good’ has no authority until it is contextualised in just and loving attention to the other. Therefore, the good moral life cannot be understood unless we “see it” and interpret it in the hermeneutic, dialogic relation of self and other – be that as internal to the

²³⁵ Lodge, David: *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, London and New York 1990, p.133.

individual, or in experiences of sameness and difference in relation to what is other to us. This will be developed in further detail in my character analyses of Tallis, Julius and Morgan (/Simon) in Part V.

PART V: Dialogues on Character and Moral Authority

13. Theoretical Perspectives on Character

13.1. On Character, Relationality and Moral Authority

It is now time to expand the somewhat narrow focus of Part III's close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* on the one hand, and Part IV's presentations of Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch on the other, and draw them together in a more comprehensive discussion on moral authority. At this stage a new concept is brought into play in order to operationalize what I have so far examined. In the following sections I will show how the concept of character in literary criticism, philosophy and ethical theory can be a key ingredient in developing further perspectives on authority. I shall first introduce a discussions on the concept of character in the contemporary debate within the field of literary theory. This discussion deals with the status of character as idea: can characters be said to have some form of existence? Is it possible to relate to words as "persons"? I shall first present some perspectives on these problems as they have been developed by the structuralist narratologists Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Seymour Chatman.

Following this, I return to the three (by now familiar) central theorists in this dissertation, namely Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch. Specifically focusing their views on character not only gives us helpful perspectives concerning the analysis of the novel, but their contributions all accentuate the multidisciplinary of the field within which this study belongs. Ricoeur's relational philosophy constitutes the hermeneutic framework in which I defend the relevance of literary analysis for moral philosophical and theological discourse, also with respect to the discussions on literary characters later in Part V. Of particular relevance will also be his establishment of the narrative self, with the 'idem'-'ipse' split as a central and characteristic aspect of his theory. Bakhtin's concept of character-zones, and his distinction between monologic and dialogic discourse, both illuminate points of interaction between discussions on character and problems of moral authority. Murdoch's philosophical deliberations on character highlight some of the more concrete problems that occur when discussing the novel.

The concept of character is also central to much contemporary ethics, in particular in the traditions of narrative- and/or virtue ethics. I shall discuss this in the light of an early, but influential text by the North American theologian Stanley Hauerwas, and show how the concept of character is both similar to and differs from a literary understanding as well as from a radical

hermeneutic approach to narrative and character. A vital task here will also be to outline elements of critique, in order to create a space for what I hope can be a contribution of a somewhat different perspective in such ethical traditions.

Finally, before entering the analyses of characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, I argue that it is fundamental to my interpretation of the novel that the characters are seen as simultaneously *types* and *individuals*. This distinction between two perspectives on the novel's characters serves to show how they have a two-fold, and thus dialectic, function in the novel. Read as *type* they represent what I shall argue is, in part, an authorial, external and formal authority. The figurations represent, at least to some extent, the author's voice, and in this, cultural ideas and archetypal images of moral concepts such as 'good' and 'evil'. Reading the characters as *individuals*, on the other hand, enables a study of the internal, relational and substantial authority of moral concepts which arises from the seeing characters grappling with the real, confusing and complex problems they face in their lives and their relationships. Thus, the universal and the particular, external and internal, objective and subjective aspects of moral concepts stand in a dynamic and interactive, not a dichotomic or exclusive relation to each other. It is, I shall argue, from such multivoiced dialogue that moral authority truly develops.

13.2. Narratology and Character

The "death of character" has been seen as a necessary consequence of the theoretical development in much structuralist and post-modern theory. In non-mimetic (i.e. semiotic) views of literature, which have had a strong influence in the field for several decades, the main argument against the concept of character is that personhood has become "decentred" in traditions where the ideology "runs counter to the ideas of individuality and psychological depth".²³⁶ The notion of humanity is reduced to textuality, and the concept of character therefore dissolves.²³⁷ However, many scholars are uncomfortable with such a notion. They wish to bring back some way of speaking about character *within* structuralist and post-structuralist climates. At first glance, the idea of character is so fundamental to the novel as genre that it can seem odd that character has been pronounced dead in contemporary literary theory. When reading a story, the reader will often feel that he or she gets to know the actual people that inhabit the universe of the novel. This is of course an illusion, but nevertheless part of the experience of

²³⁶ Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*, p.30.

²³⁷ On such a view, Murdoch comments sarcastically: "Popular deconstructionist literature challenges the traditional conception of literary characters. The notion of the person as having a particular private flow of consciousness begins to be a trifle shadowy. 'Just being a person doesn't work anymore', a poem of John Ashbery suggests. Perhaps the whole human race is changing?" (MGM:151).

reading. In continuation of Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan discusses this in a manner in which he seeks to bridge two dominant views on character, namely the *realist* and the *non-realist* perspectives. I find his argument convincing, and relevant to the present study. Therefore I base my own views largely on his.²³⁸

Conceptions of character are closely connected with the wider theoretical ideologies that deal with the relation between fiction and reality, and even reality itself. In literary theory, there are two fundamental approaches to how literature as phenomenon is to be understood: in mimetic theories, literature is regarded as offering imitations of reality (although the extent of such mirroring is disputed). In the extreme, therefore, literary characters will sometimes be treated as if they were real people, who can be analysed by use of, for instance, psychological theories. The distinction between fiction and reality becomes blurred. This tradition has a long history in the field of literary theory, but the primacy of such an essential understanding character has been severely criticized throughout the last decades. Such criticism has primarily come from post-structuralist theorists who regard literature as semiotic systems, i.e. non-representational constructions. All reality is textuality, open to interpretation, relativisations and de/-reconstruction. In such theories, the subject (or here, character) is part of a meaning-system (discourse), and has no primary or foundational basis as the given centre of thought. The subject/character is not an entity in itself, but a product of the discourses it is embedded in and surrounded by.

Rimmon-Kenan uses the distinction between ‘text’ (the actual spoken/written words)²³⁹ and ‘story’ (the abstract construct of the narrated events)²⁴⁰ to argue that the above views on character can be partially reconciled by seeing them as “relating to different aspects of narrative fiction”.²⁴¹ One such is the textual aspect, a (semiotic) meaning-system in which different methods of characterization provide a basis for another aspect, which is the reader’s construction, or imagination, of a given character. This *abstraction* can be recognized in the story as *person-like* (mimetic), and it is therefore possible to analyse characters as entities with given names and “personalities” as I do in this study. However, it is also relevant to reflect on whether or not the textual material actually does provide the grounds for a successful construction of such a person-like entity. In fact, as has become clear in the close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the lack of credible “individuality” is an important point of access

²³⁸ Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*, p.29-58.

²³⁹ Chatman calls this “discourse”.

²⁴⁰ Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*, p.3.

²⁴¹ Same book, p.33.

to the characters we study. Therefore, the oscillation between a mimetic and semiotic view on the characters will be an aspect of the forthcoming analyses of Tallis, Julius and Morgan. This is a perspective incorporated in the duality of studying the characters respectively as *types* (a semiotic view) and *individuals* (a mimetic view).

How, then, are characters recognized and constructed? Rimmon-Kenan bases his discussion on Chatman's definition of character, which provides me with a helpful point of access to the forthcoming character analysis (both methodologically and theoretically): "[A] conception of character as a paradigm of traits; 'trait' in the sense of 'relatively stable or abiding personal quality,' recognizing that it may either unfold (...) or that it may disappear and be replaced by another".²⁴² Such traits can be discovered through close reading and discussion of different aspects of the text, gathering momentum from characterization by, for instance, a narrator or other characters, through the use of symbols, or through studying intertextual references. They can be seen in action (or inaction), and in passages where a character reflects on him-/herself. As in "real life", however, it is always important to be aware of the fact that knowing another or oneself is always difficult. Identifying the degree of truthfulness, credibility and level of insight concerning the factors above, is therefore an important part of the quest towards understanding the characters one studies.

Further, the degree of complexity in the presentation of such "clusters of traits" will vary a great deal. A necessary aspect of characterization is therefore the classic distinction between "round" and "flat" characters.²⁴³ "Round" characters are more complex, and thus more person-like than "flat" characters. However, "flat" characters (representatives of one or only a few traits) can be very important in a story. Regarding the analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, both Julius and Tallis are interesting as characters because they are ambiguous in this sense: they can be seen as both "round" (as *individuals*) and "flat" (as *types*), depending on the angle from which we study them.

At this point it can be necessary to repeat that, although I hold that literature mirrors reality in the sense that it is an aesthetic representation of real life experience (i.e. I am partial to mimetic theories), literature is not reality. Literature is form, it is represented reality, and it is therefore different from real life. This ambiguous, or dialogic, relation of sameness and difference between literature and reality is necessary to bear in mind when I study the characters of a novel in order to discuss and develop the issue of moral authority in human life reality.

²⁴² Chatman: *Story and Discourse*, p.126.

²⁴³ Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*, p.40.

As mentioned above, character traits can be identified by studies of action. In much literary theory, from Aristotle via Russian formalists to structuralists such as, for instance, Greimas, the focus on action has been dominant. For Aristotle, character portrayal was in essence to describe the actions of men. Greimas' primary contribution to literary theory was his actantial model, which is, fundamentally, a model which explicates the action of a plot: characters are understood primarily in their roles as agents or receivers. Analysis of a novel thus involves ascribing the characters, objects etc. a place in the model. For my purpose, the character's actions are important, particularly when there seems to be discrepancy between actions and their "character traits". The discontinuity between being and action is thus particularly illuminating. How does one interpret actions that are "out of character"? It is necessary to be aware of the problem of whether such inconsistency is a flaw in the creation of the text, or if it is an integral part of the character portrayal.

On the basis of the reflections above, I shall retain the concept of literary character as useful to my analysis. It is important, however, that this is done with an awareness of its textual nature. From this point onwards the characters, as mental abstractions which are constructed from their textual basis, will be treated as "persons" in so far as they are individually recognized as "clusters of traits" that are given names and perform actions in the narrated story. That character is defined as *recognizable traits*, and that the relation between character and *action* is important, provides me with links to Ricoeur's philosophy. His scope, however, is wider than and rather different to that of a literary context. He develops the idea of character further by turning to issues of narrative identity, contextuality and not least, relationality.

13.3. Revisiting Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch

a) Ricoeur: Character as Aspects of Selfhood

The concept of character provides a pregnant point of interaction between moral philosophy and literary theory. Particularly in the tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics, 'character' is given a high priority as a concept in which the continuity between being and action is embodied. Ricoeur cannot be regarded as a virtue ethicist, and I shall return to some further aspects of the Aristotelian position soon. However, from the point of view of the relations between hermeneutics, ethics and literary theory, his contribution is important. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur uses the term 'character' to identify several aspects of what it means to be a "self". It is therefore an crucial and complex concept in this book. He primarily defines it as follows: "Character (...) designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized."

(OA:121) He later uses the phrase “habitual traits” (ibid). We can see that his definition corresponds quite closely to Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan’s understanding of (literary) character as the identification of a cluster of traits that are recognizable as the same person over time. Such an understanding of ‘self’ is, according to Ricoeur, what makes it possible to distinguish one person (or literary character) from another.

Ricoeur also refers to another aspect of character: that of seeing it as “acquired dispositions”. This stresses that an individual comes into being in relation to what is other:

(...) the identity of a person or community is made up of these identifications with values, norm, ideals, models and heroes, *in* which the person or community recognizes itself. Recognizing oneself *in* contributes to recognizing oneself *by*.” (OA:121)

The point Ricoeur makes here is similar to Bakhtin’s view, that the

human coming-to-consciousness (...) is a constant struggle between [authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse]: an attempt to assimilate more into one’s system, and the simultaneous freeing of one’s own discourse from the authoritative word, or from previous persuasive words that have ceased to mean.²⁴⁴

On this basis, a literary character can be seen as a representative model of the struggle between assimilation and differentiation in relation to what is external: a study of characters in a novel can illuminate how identification with and appropriation of values, norms or for instance the meaning of words, is a fundamental part of the internalization of the other as one-self, and thus part of the process of developing what Ricoeur refers to as ‘selfhood’.

Ricoeur, then, has established two aspects of character: a) lasting dispositions (a static view) and b) acquired dispositions (a dynamic view). It is when he brings in other notions, such as narrativity, emplotment, action and interaction that the whole problematic becomes more difficult. However, it is fruitful to analyse some aspects of this complexity, as there are several nuances in Ricoeur’s philosophical reflections on character that provides tools with which I can grasp some of the deep dialogism, ambiguity and complexity of the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It is necessary to point out that he does not only (or even primarily) discuss character as a literary concept. However, recalling his mimetic understanding of literature, the points he makes are relevant both with respect to literature and to “real life”.

In Part IV I presented a central aspect of Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutic of selfhood’, which is the distinction he makes between the self understood as ‘idem’ (*sameness* in contrast to what is different) and ‘ipse’ (*selfhood* as it is constituted by relational contextuality). For Ricoeur,

²⁴⁴ Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.424. (From the glossary over Bakhtinian terminology.)

character is one form of a self's permanence in time (the other being keeping one's word), and is where *idem*- and *ipse*-identity converge: "[C]haracter is able to constitute the limit point where the problematic of *ipse* becomes indiscernible from that of *idem*, and where one is inclined not to distinguish them from each other." (OA:121) The self is thus identifiable as an entity over time both in *contrast* to what is different (*idem*), and in dynamic relation with what is other through the individual's history (*ipse*). Thus, when we study characters in novels, it is not sufficient to isolate the "clusters of traits" by which the individual character can be recognized (*idem-identity*). We must also study the relational frameworks within which the character acquires its traits (*ipse-identity*).

How, then, does Ricoeur treat the connection between character and action? He does not deny that action is an important part of the self, but he brings it into a larger perspective. It is an integral part of his hermeneutic of selfhood to ask the question "who acts?" in order to avoid a decontextualized concept of self. Particularly relevant here is the way he uses the concept of character to describe an internal relation between the subject of the actions at one pole, and the reflective self who can tell the story about it at another. However, that it is possible to "act out of character" is an indication that character does not only transcend, or include, action, but that action and character can also be *other* to one another. Such a relationship of discontinuity becomes, or can be identified in, a further dynamic structure within character, namely that of narrativity. Narrativity is an important concept in understanding personal growth, discontinuity and/or paradox in the development of self. For Ricoeur, character belongs to what he calls the "narrativization of personal identity" (OA: 121). In this sense, therefore, character is the *reflective story* of the "who" that acts (which includes the action), and is not reduced to being an *imitation* of action. Thus, character does not imply a static entity which does not change. It is a wide enough concept to include a dialectic of sameness and difference concerning traits (habitual and acquired), and action and reflexivity.

The final point on Ricoeur and character which needs to be considered here is the relation between plot and character. At this stage, Ricoeur explicitly uses tools from literary theory in order to develop his philosophical argument. A premise for the following, which also highlights the point established above, is that

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her "experiences". Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (OA:147-8)

Thus, character cannot be understood without its intimate connection with 'plot'. This, however, is not a simple relationship in literary fiction. Ricoeur speaks of a dialectic of character and plot which can be seen in the experiments which literature (as a "vast laboratory for thought experiments" (OA:148)) provides to the exploration of aspects of identity:

At one end, the character in the story has a definite character, which is identifiable and reidentifiable as the same: this may well be the status of the characters in fairy tales in our folklore. The classic novel (...) can be said to have explored the intermediary space of variations, where through transformations of the character, the identification of the same decreases without disappearing entirely. We approach the opposite pole with the so-called novel of apprenticeship and move even closer with the stream-of-consciousness novel. The relation between the plot and the character appears to be inverted here (...). It is here that the identity of the character, escaping the control of the plot and of its ordering principle, is truly put to the test. We thus reach an extreme pole of variation where the character in the story ceases to have a definite character. (OA:148)

With reference to the close reading of the novel, it can be argued that the whole arena between the poles above is explored in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Axel, Peter and Leonard are close to being folkloric figures, with easily identifiable traits every time they appear in the story. To a certain extent, Tallis and Julius are also such easily identifiable characters, particularly in the cases in which they are identified as *types* that represent ideas. There is textual evidence that Tallis "is good", and Julius "is evil". Further, Hilda, Rupert, Simon and Morgan all represent different degrees of the middle ground. They are identifiable as *individual* characters, yet they change, can be inconsistent with regard to what one could expect from the rest of the story, and sometimes act surprisingly.

The final pole, where character escapes plot and is "put to the test", is the most difficult to handle or understand. Ricoeur refers to literature of this kind as "fictions of loss of identity". The point he makes here enables me to discuss some of the more complex aspects of Tallis, Julius and Morgan. I have indicated that Morgan's story (and in its parallel story in Simon) is a story of "becoming", a pilgrimage. Ricoeur's reference to "the so-called novel of apprenticeship" in which the character is put to the test, will resurface in the analysis of Morgan. Further, Several scenes have been identified in which Tallis's inner life is represented by a non-narrative stream-of-consciousness. In the close reading, it became clear that Tallis is an extremely difficult character to identify and describe. Both at the beginning (FHD:110-11) and at the end of his story (FHD:443-2), there is textual evidence that he experiences a deep sense of "nothingness": a loss of identity. Thus, in Tallis's case, there is an oscillation between character and non-such whose implications I shall discuss later.

Concerning Julius's narrative, the same structure does not exist. In fact, he reverts utterly to type at the end of the novel. He is never "put to the test" (or is he?). There is no depth, and his final actions (enjoying food and drink in Paris) are very much "in character" with the evil, non-emphatic *type* that has been developed throughout the novel. However, there is an aspect of Julius's narrative which is only referred to, never actually told, namely that of his experience in a concentration-camp during the war. This is, in a sense, Julius's character *outside* of the plot, which we have no access to. It is therefore impossible to understand his actions. Until the information about Julius's war-time experience is provided at the end of the novel, he is rather easily recognizable and identifiable as evil. Afterwards, however, this is not unambiguously so. The answer to the question of "who" Julius is, the self, the person who acts, becomes elusive precisely because of the lack of narration of something one senses is important in order to understand who he is.

Related to this problem, but from a slightly different point of view, is the complex two-foldness of Julius and Tallis as simultaneously *types* and *individuals* which I have mentioned earlier. There are stages in the novel in which Tallis and Julius "lose their identities", in the sense that they do not come across as person-like, but as ideas. Here, the point made above is inverted: their characters are disrupted by something non-fictional (namely the ideas), which, so to speak, intrude into the narrative. The aspects of the two men which clearly represent philosophical ideas serve to dissolve their credibility as "true" mimetic characters. The plot, or narrative, becomes a forced configuration of ideas. This makes the two of them elusive, and they both at times appear to be non-human. Further, it reminds the reader that they *are* artistic form.

This, then, provides a partial background for my study of the (emplotted) characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. I have studied Ricoeur's understanding of significant stages of the narrative(s), the development of the plot(s), and the characteristic traits as they appear in symbol, speech (direct and indirect), action etc. Crucial to my argument in the thesis, is that the stories of the characters is the place where a complex relation between 'self' as sameness and selfhood can be identified at one pole, and at the other pole, the relation between 'self' and 'other' in a wider sense. This insight is instrumental to understanding relationality as fundamental both intratextually and intertextually with regard to character (literary as well as in "real life"). The stories of the characters which are to be studied are about identity as it is shaped by their experiences, habits and history, as well as their becoming who they are through their attempts to cope with the demands that society and relationships bring upon

them. Further, these stories can serve as models which open up to an understanding of character as a “place” in which moral authority can be developed as a dynamic of inner life and external action.

b) Bakhtin: The Dialogues of Character-Zones

In Chapter 10, where Bakhtin’s thought was introduced, I made the point that one of the important aspects of the dialogic novel is that no single world view is represented by voices in the text. Through the dialogization of the different voices different perspectives are represented, and reality is thus refracted and relativized. This is a significant aspect of Bakhtin’s view on the authority with which a novel voices the search for meaning and truth. I showed that Bakhtin distinguishes between two forms of authority in prose, one which is monologic (represented by one voice) and one dialogic (represented by many voices). In monologic *authoritative discourse*, the authority belongs on an authorial level, external to the text. The authority inherent in *internally persuasive discourse* arises from the dialogue in the multitude of the many voices involved in relation to a text (authors, narrators, characters, readers and voices from other texts). To state it simply: the reader is convinced of the novel-text’s truths from having interacted with the text, not from being “told” its meaning by the author. An important aspect of such internally persuasive discourse is the sense of its inherent authority not yet having been finalized.

The implications of such a view on authority for my discussions on character, can be exemplified by way of Bakhtin’s juxtaposition of the epic hero and the hero of the novel. Bakhtin often uses the term “hero” interchangeably with “character”. About the epic hero, he writes the following:

The individual in the high distanced genres is an individual of the absolute past and of the distant image. As such he is a fully finished and complete being. This has been accomplished on a lofty, heroic level, but what is complete is also something hopelessly ready-made; he is all there, from beginning to end he coincides with himself, he is absolutely equal to himself. He is, furthermore, completely externalized. (...) He has already become everything that he could become, and he could become only that which he has already become. (DI:34)

Most significant here is that the epic hero is set in finalized time. He is finished and complete, a given entity that is not meant to surprise. He does not change in interaction with a reader. In the novel-genre, there are two major factors which produce a very different kind of individual, hero or character from that of the epic text. These are a difference in the conception of time on the one hand, and on the other, the novel’s use of extra-linguistic elements which are brought into the text (i.e. intertextuality). The high and distanced epic genre refers to completed time.

The past is given, and does not invite the reader into dialogue with it. The novel, however, belongs where time is an inconclusive present (this also applies to historical novels). This radicalizes the idea of the hero. The time of a novel is fundamentally a “zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality” (DI:39). This zone has as its core “personal experience and free creative imagination” (DI:39). The time-frame of a novel therefore brings into play new images and thus possibilities of what Bakhtin calls a “continuous re-structuring of the individual”:

A dynamic authenticity was introduced into the image of man, dynamics of inconsistency and tension between various factors of this image; man ceased to coincide with himself, and consequently men ceased to be exhausted by the plots that contain them. (DI:35)

The character of a dialogic novel is therefore authentic (in the sense that a human life is inconsistent and uncontainable) precisely because the temporal orientation is towards an unfinalized future. Such characters can potentially be “free” in relation to the plots within which they are planned by the author, which is a point which Ricoeur too has developed, as we saw above. The second aspect in which the novel-genre (and thus also characters in a novel) differs from the epic genre, is that the novel has what Bakhtin calls a “zone of contact” with genres that are not explicitly literary. In the case of my analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, I have in the close reading shown that this is particularly relevant with regard to the genres of letters, confessions, philosophical debates, and the strong presence of visual art. All these extra-narrative forms brings the novel into dynamic interaction with the historic reality of its time of origin, and the present and future of the reader. Says Bakhtin:

These phenomena are precisely what characterize the novel as a developing genre. After all, the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven. Every specific situation is historical. (DI:33)

The conception of the novel as existing in the midst of development is structurally parallel to a Ricoeurian hermeneutic understanding of meaning and truth, as that which always lies “beyond”. Any position is always challenged by its relation to what is other. This does not mean that one cannot hold something to be true or right at a moment in time, but involves a necessary awareness that the final answers will always lie somewhere in the future. A dialogue, or a hermeneutic approach to understanding, must always bear this in mind. For a reader, this means that the meaning-making in relation to the novel text arises in his or her active involvement with the represented voices in the present, thus actually becoming part of the dialogue. Meaning becomes internalized in the historical present. This is in contrast to the reader being exposed to a single, finalized voice (as in the epic genre), a voice which can later be

recited and which represents a given truth which, as Bakhtin says, is seen to be “laid up in heaven”.

How can I specifically treat the issue of authority in relation to the present discussion on character? The most important aspect here is that, according to Bakhtin, characters are representations of voices, and thus take a central part in any novelistic dialogue, in addition to the author and the reader. Bakhtin uses the image of “zones” several times: he refers to temporal zones, and zones of contact with the extra-literary genres. In continuation from this, he sees character-zones as linguistic “rooms” in which representations of time, space, action, characterization, and, fundamentally, speech, intermingle and interact, thus giving dialogic form to each character. In the close reading of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, several of these different aspects in the story have been identified. An awareness of character-zones (although not necessarily explicit) is necessary in order to discuss the credibility of the resulting recognizable characters: is Julius believable as a representation of evil? Does Tallis represent an authoritative configuration of good? In what ways does or does it not make sense that Morgan “is” the Human Soul? Are the images trustworthy? If so, on what grounds?

In order to have this discussion, it is important to bear in mind that Bakhtin’s definition of a novel involves the *heteroglossia*, i.e. the many languages represented in a novel text. It is also necessary to remember that a character is a “zone” where an artistic representation of such heteroglossia takes place. The different languages can be identified both within a character-zone (i.e. a character can internalize many different patterns of speech, or languages), and at the point of contact between different character-zones. Further, there are two “poles” in the use of language: one is the unitary aspect of language (that which makes it possible to understand others) and at the other end, the speech which is particular to an individual. (DI:269). The following quotation shows something of the diversity of identifiable voices which, according to Bakhtin, can be represented in a novel-text:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (...) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (...) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (DI:262-3)

With regard to Murdoch’s novels, heteroglossia is not immediately a striking feature. Most of the characters in all her novels have manners of speech which are seemingly rather uniform, a

feature which is not only because most of her characters have similar background and class. The characters are not easily identifiable by voice or speech type alone. However, this does not mean that there are not several strata of linguistic styles within her novels, but that they are somewhat hidden in the text. This is an aspect of Murdoch's novels which could be a valid argument against them being "perfectly" dialogical. In continuation of this, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* does not completely avoid the presence of a monologic, external authority, namely that of Iris Murdoch the philosopher's presence in the text. The novel in question is, nevertheless, deeply dialogic, although the voices to a certain extent merge at the stage of actual representation. The time-factor mentioned above is important in this sense. The reader becomes involved in the unfinalized "here-and-now" of the text. In addition to this, the strong presence and use of extra-linguistic elements (images, symbols) serves a deeply dialogic function in the text.

Having mentioned the lack of distinctive voices in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, it is nevertheless true that the characters come across as distinctive persons. This has to a certain extent to do with individual voices although they are also clearly recognizable as Murdochian characters. As a character uses language, he/she/it in part uses given language (and thus enters other zones). At the same time the language of a given character is idiosyncratic and can be recognized as belonging to a particular individual. The *recognizability* of zones is similar to what I in earlier discussions have identified with regard to character traits. Thus, a character-zone is a linguistic version of the conception of character as a "cluster of traits". Within a character-zone, there is therefore a constant dialogue between sameness and difference, or, in other words, between what is universal and what is particular.

Bakhtin's language-based theory also echoes Ricoeur's more complex distinction between 'idem' and 'ipse'. According to him, character is where these different aspects of identity become indistinguishable, providing the concept of character with a thickness (or roundness) of being. Similarly then, the character-zone is the place in time and space which the character inhabits in the text, and where it becomes an individual through constant dialogue with what is external, but which by interaction becomes internalized and idiosyncratic. In this the earlier points made about the present study of "sameness and difference" within characters are echoed, or as I have formulated it in my case: the reading of the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* through the lens of the textual struggle between their being both *types* and *individuals*. Before I shall say some more about such a reading, however, I shall first study what Murdoch herself has to say about character.

c) Murdoch: The Relative Freedom of Character

Murdoch's theoretical reflection on character is somewhat less complex than what I have shown to be the case in the work of Ricoeur and Bakhtin above. Her views on the theme appear sporadically in her philosophical texts, and are usually present as arguments for whatever else she is discussing. Nevertheless, there are some interesting points to be made at this stage, particularly as it is worth studying whether or not Murdoch herself lives up to her high ideals concerning the nature of the relation between a novelist and his/her characters. When Murdoch touches upon the theme, her argument often takes the form of statements on how novelists ideally should treat their characters. One of her most famous comments on character is this: "A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art of prose".²⁴⁵ From this perspective, she ranks Shakespeare as the writer who has the "best" characters, followed by the great nineteenth-century novelists like Tolstoy, Eliot and Austen (EM/SBR:271-2). Murdoch's ideal is that characters are to be "free", in the sense that they should be independent of the author, not necessarily that they are "of an independent mind" (EM/SBR:276). Her reflections on the concept of character is thus paired with the "problem" of freedom.²⁴⁶

Much of Murdoch's own discussion on character and freedom takes place in two essays, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" and "Against Dryness". In these, she uses the notion of character as an example by which she develops her argument concerning the distance between philosophy and literature. Important to her in this discussion is the question of whether literature can "cure" what she identifies as the malaise of modern, liberal philosophy, about which she writes that "we have been left with far too shallow and flimsy view of human personality".²⁴⁷ Her fundamental argument thus goes against what she sees as the narrow anthropology of contemporary philosophy – on the one hand the Anglo-Saxon "joining of a materialistic behaviourism with a dramatic view of the individual as solitary will" (stemming from Hume and Kant), and on the other, Sartreian existentialism where the individual is, following both Hegel and Kant, solitary and totally free. She develops this argument by identifying different manners in which corresponding "shallow and flimsy" characters dominate in Twentieth Cen-

²⁴⁵ Murdoch, Iris: "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" in: Murdoch: *Existentialists and Mystics*. (p.287-296), p. 286. (This essay will be referred to in the text as EM/SBR.)

²⁴⁶ This is also reflected in Murdoch criticism: in *Degrees of Freedom*, A.S. Byatt's important study of many of Murdoch's earlier novels, Byatt focuses on the characters from the point of view of their relative freedom at different levels of the text.

²⁴⁷ Murdoch, Iris: "Against Dryness" in: Murdoch: *Existentialist and Mystics* (p.287-296), p. 287. (This essay will be referred to in the text as EM/AD.)

ture literature by making a sharp distinction between two kinds of “dry” modern novel, that is to say, what she calls the “crystalline” and “journalistic” styles of writing:

The twentieth-century novel is usually either crystalline or journalistic; that is, it is either a small quasi-allegorical object portraying the human condition and not containing ‘characters’ in the nineteenth-century sense, or else it is a large shapeless quasi-documentary object, the degenerate descendant of the nineteenth-century novel, telling, with pale conventional characters, some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts. (EM/AD:291)

The main point here is to focus on Murdoch’s critique of the notion of character within these traditions, and what she sees as their failure to grapple with contingent reality. This provides the basis for her suggestion that a revitalising of certain ideas from nineteenth-century literature can serve as “proof” that the modern, individualistic “man” who inhabits contemporary philosophy does not, in her words “offer (...) any other complete and powerful picture of the soul” (EM/AD:289). In her opinion, the nineteenth-century novel “was not concerned with ‘the human condition’, it was concerned with real various individuals struggling in society” (EM/AD:291). The freedom of character ought therefore not to be the abstract freedom of the solitary will, but a freedom which belongs within the messy life of human relationships. Turning to Murdoch’s own literary work, she attempts to live up to her own high ideals concerning such relational freedom. Heusel identifies how she achieves the characters’ (relative) freedom by use of the visual aspect as her fundamental metaphor.²⁴⁸ She imagines what the world looks like from perspectives other than her own. From *within* the relationships and social situations she constructs, we “see” reality (physically and metaphorically) along with the characters’ perceptions of it:

During the 1950s and 1960s Murdoch worked at creating, developing and perfecting two dynamic narrative strategies for recording her free characters as they experience momentary insights, larger revelations and rebirth – as they *see*, in the sense of gaining understanding. Seeing and understanding, seeing and appreciation, seeing and loving, seeing and good are all related, for Murdoch, to removing the veil of illusion.²⁴⁹

This also corresponds to Murdoch’s metaphor of the novel as a house, mentioned above. She as novelist provides the architectural framework, the relational structure within which the characters are free to live as “themselves”, to see, and sometimes gain insight. Not least, following the point made by Heusel above, their moving around in the house provides a multitude of perspectives which juxtapose one another. For Murdoch, the artist must therefore be tolerant of her characters and what they see.

²⁴⁸ See the discussion of this in Part IV, Chapter 11.

²⁴⁹ Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.247.

A great novelist is essentially tolerant, that is, displays a real apprehension of persons other than the author as having a right to exist and to have a separate mode of being which is important and interesting to themselves. (...) The social scene is a life-giving framework and not a set of dead conventions or stereotyped settings inhabited by stock characters. And the individuals portrayed in the novels are free, independent of their author, and not merely puppets in the exteriorisation of some closely locked psychological conflict of his own. (EM/SBR:271)

That the characters are free, and that the novelist should be tolerant of his/her characters, is a difficulty which the writer continuously faces. For Murdoch, there is for the artist a “conflict between the form-maker and the truthful formless figure”²⁵⁰ This is an interesting example of her reflection as an artist on the question of authority, particularly that she attributes “truthfulness” to the formless figure that is *other* than the form-making of the artist. We have seen how she describes the relation between form and the characters’ freedom as the way in which the novelist (herself) provides a deep pattern which has a situation of relationality as its structural basis. Thus, she insists, the characters develop more or less independently of her:

(...) if you get hold of a good character, he will invent himself, will invent his mode of speech and his past, make his jokes, and so on. The thing is to get the fundamental patterns right, the basic idea of what it’s all about and who the people are. It begins for me with a very small, but one hopes very powerful, nucleus of two or three people in a situation.²⁵¹

It is important to notice here that in addition to vision, Murdoch also sees voice (more than language) as being a prominent aspect of the character’s freedom: the character “will invent his mode of speech”. This echoes the weight Bakhtin places on voice as a primary aspect of a character-zone. Further, the dialogue which necessarily emerges from the “two or three people in a situation” corresponds to the perspectivity, relativity and refraction of single voices which constitutes Bakhtin’s idea of the polyphonic novel. For Bakhtin, the authority of a novel lies in its possibility of internal persuasion. This occurs, as I have discussed, in the dialogue between author, characters and not least the reader. Murdoch’s primarily visual mode of thinking provides us with a rather different metaphor. For her, a novel’s authority has to do with its open, “swampy” texture in the sense that it “communicates with life”. It is in the illuminating flow backwards and forwards between life and literature that the reader questions his or her own life as well as the authority of the novel-text:

The novel, in the great nineteenth-century sense, attempts to envisage if not the whole of life, at any rate a piece of it large and varied enough to seem to illuminate the whole, and has most

²⁵⁰ Murdoch quoted from an interview (Bellamy, Michael O.: “An Interview with Iris Murdoch.” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 18 (1977): 129-40) in: Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.243.

²⁵¹ Murdoch quoted from an interview (Heusel, Barbara S: “A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch”. *University of Windsor Review* 21.1 (1988):p.1-13) in: Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.244.

obviously an open texture (...). The object is as it were full of holes through which it communicates with life, and life flows in and out of it. (...) The thing is open in the sense that it looks towards life and life looks back. We ask ourselves, would it be like that? (MGM:96)

The fundamental ideal for a Murdochian understanding of the free character does, therefore, not concern an individualistic or solitary freedom of will. The problem of freedom is fundamentally set within the particular contexts, in situations which the artist creates, and where the characters struggle with themselves, each other and with life in general. It is thus within the characters' relationships that they have freedom of speech, freedom to invent their pasts, and freedom of action and of development of traits – or personality. It is also, following this, fundamental to a study of Murdoch's novels to avoid any analysis of a character as an isolated solitary individual.²⁵² Further, these free characters provide the novel with a possibility of internal, relational authority. Such relational authority also reaches further than the novel, in the sense that it also stands in a referential relationship with life. The ideal Murdochian literary text is a novel which "looks towards life and life looks back". And it is this quality which, in her opinion, can "cure" philosophy of its narrow view of humanity.

Murdoch's artistic ideal is, however, an almost impossible achievement, which she herself only partially lives up to. After having read several of her novels, a reader is not surprised that the characters stem from one mind. They are somewhat different from each other, and I do not doubt that they have "invented themselves", i.e. taken on a form of personality as the creation of the novel has proceeded. Nevertheless, Murdochian characters are quite easily recognizable, particularly in their manner of speech. They are also characteristic with respect to the identifiable patterns which structure their internal thought, and to a certain extent also mould their actions.

A final comment on Murdoch's view is necessary in order to prepare the way for the forthcoming analysis of characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It is important to remember that the conflict-ridden relationship between ideals and the actual formlessness of character is, in fact, part of her theory. Although a novel "is" life represented by artistic form provided by the artist, that which is imitated is – according to Murdoch – deeply formless and pointless:

Characters in novels partake of the funniness and absurdity and contingent incompleteness and lack of dignity of people in ordinary life. We read here both the positive being of individuals and also their lack of formal wholeness. We are, as real people, unfinished and full of blankness and jumble; only in our own illusioning fantasy are we complete. Good novels concern the fight between good and evil and the pilgrimage from appearance to reality. They expose vanity and inculcate humility. They are amazingly moral. (MGM:97)

²⁵² This was an argument for the selection of passages for the close reading.

I shall return to these conflicts of form and individuality with respect to the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* shortly, and the dilemmas which Murdoch herself identifies will be treated more in depth at this stage. I leave her work for a while now, however, and will discuss some further, hopefully illuminative, aspects of the concept of character as it has been treated in the field of ethics (primarily theological ethics).

13.4. The Ethical Turn to Narrative and Character

Unqualified, the word ‘character’, as such, is often thought to signify something morally good. In ordinary (if somewhat old fashioned) language usage, “A Woman of Character” would be likely to mean a just, compassionate, honest woman, whose traits are valued as stable and coherent. However, because we can add adjectives such as “bad”, or “literary”, or “implausible”, ‘character’ does not necessarily in *itself* imply a moral goodness. Thus, what character is, means, can mean, or ought to mean, is very much open to discussion. I have already treated several different aspects of this concept as it has been developed in literary theory, and in the philosophies of Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch. I shall now turn to contemporary ethics, in order to see what voices from this arena bring to the dialogue on character. This I will approach from a positive point of view before I raise some critical questions, informed by the theoretical perspectives of a hermeneutic dialogics. The important underlying question throughout this chapter, is: how can these ethical voices contribute to an illumination of the problem of moral authority?

For many philosophers and theologians, character has become *the* way of speaking about the moral subject, its rationality and its “place” in the world. It has become a key concept in accounts of the internal relations of issues such as selfhood and morality, intention and action, and subjectivity and contextuality. This is particularly true in a theological context, although a (partial) reason for such a turn lies in a broader, philosophical turn to narrativist views of reality and personhood, as in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (primarily in *After Virtue*) and, as we have seen, in Ricoeur’s work.²⁵³ Narrative is by many seen as a fundamental formative

²⁵³ Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, Ricoeur has been given relatively little attention in this arena of character/narrative ethics. This is probably because a dominant strand of the discourse has been toward seeing character as inherent to particular traditions, and not to understanding the concepts of character and narrative in a more general, phenomenological sense (which, to a certain extent, is what Ricoeur does). This dominant strand echoes the position labelled “theological hermeneutics” (in opposition to “hermeneutic theology”) mentioned in Part II (Cf Chapter 5.4.), as it has been articulated by, among others, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and – not least – Stanley Hauerwas. For a short discussion of a major debate between Frei and Ricoeur concerning hermeneutics, narrativity and selfhood,

structure of human personhood and reality, and this has been and is central to the idea of character ethics. An important feature of character ethics, therefore, is the same as within narrative ethics: that the significance of the contextually situated person/moral subject/agent supersedes the ethical focus on decontextualised reason/action/decision. The concept of ‘character’ *as narrative* is seen by many as a unifying term with regard to understanding aspects of the moral self as social being.

In an article about narrative ethics, the theologian William Barbieri writes: “The central thesis of a narrativist ethics, broadly stated, is that morality is, at root, constituted by stories – that our judgements about right and wrong, good and evil, and our resulting actions, are dependent on the stories we tell and are shaped by.”²⁵⁴ Barbieri’s reference to the importance of “the stories we tell and are shaped by”, illustrates two intermingling perspectives within narrativist views on selfhood: one concerns narrative from the individual’s point of view (the stories we tell about ourselves), and the other represents a contextual, or communitarian point of view (the stories of our culture or tradition, by which we are formed). In literature on the theme, the two perspectives are always seen in a tight relation to each other. Narrative, or story, is seen to be the interpretative code for all rationality, morality and contextuality, and, not least, to understanding the relation between individual and community.

It should not come as a surprise that I agree that the relation between narrative (or here: story) and selfhood is deeply relevant to morality. Making such a claim, however, does not lead very far with respect to character. What does Barbieri mean when he speaks of the narrativist claim that “morality is (...) constituted by stories”? What are these stories? How do they function? And how is ‘narrative’ to be understood in the first place? Or in relation to ‘selfhood’?²⁵⁵ Many have attempted to answer such questions, and the difference between seemingly similar

see: Hauerwas, Stanley and L. Gregory Jones (eds): *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Michigan 1989, p. 6-7. For a critical comment on this debate between what often is referred to as the “Yale” and “Chicago” schools, see: Stroup, George: “Theology of Narrative or Narrative Theology? A Response to *Why Narrative?*” in: *Theology Today*, January 1991, vol 47, no 4 (p.424-432) p.426. He points out that the “Chicago school” of hermeneutics (specifically contributors such as Ricoeur and David Tracy) has been given less attention than deserved.

²⁵⁴ Barbieri, William A. (jr): “Ethics and the Narrated Life” in: *The Journal of Religion*, July 1998, Vol 78 Nr 3, (p.363 – 386), p.362.

²⁵⁵ As I said in Part I (“Delimitation of the Problem Field”, Chapter 2.3.), I do not see it as my task in this work to write a comprehensive guide to or discussion of narrative ethics as such. It would seem strange, however, to not comment on the debate on character within narrative ethics.

theologies or philosophies can often run deeper than they seem to at first glance.²⁵⁶ It is with respect to this that the present chapter has its focus, because the work I do on character and narrative in this thesis differs in some ways from what, in many respects, can be described as the mainstream branch of character ethics which I shall present here. Therefore, this chapter provides a background to understanding central aspects of my critical agenda.

The most influential advocate and pioneer of character in theological ethics has, for several decades, been the theologian Stanley Hauerwas. His book *Character and the Christian Life* from 1975 has been widely read and discussed.²⁵⁷ Thirty years later, Hauerwas is probably most famous for his post-liberal project in which the Church as a community, defined by its story, centred in the story of Jesus Christ, is and must be the primary context for a Christian's ethical reflection and action. Although, as shall become clear, I do not adhere to the post-liberal thesis, I find much of his early work on character to be illuminative and important, and I am indebted to what I have learned from him.²⁵⁸

Hauerwas's definition of character is as follows: "By the idea of character I mean the qualification of man's self-agency through his beliefs, intentions and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being."²⁵⁹ This definition takes its starting point from the individual's point of view, and reflects a particular anthropology: agency and autonomy are not seen as isolated, or even constitutive, aspects of what "man" is (which had been the case in what Hauerwas sweepingly terms as "the standard account of moral rationality"²⁶⁰). They *do* belong in the picture, but in a larger, thicker picture,

²⁵⁶ Background texts to parts of this discussion have been: Nelson, Paul: *Narrative and Morality. A Theological Enquiry*, Pennsylvania 1987, and Andersson, Helen: *Det estetiska projektet och det etiska. Tvärvetenskapliga perspektiv på Lars Ahlins författarskap*. Lund 1998.

²⁵⁷ Hauerwas, Stanley: *Character and the Christian Life. A Study in Theological Ethics*. Notre Dame, USA 1975/1994. A later article has also been important in the shift to character in ethics: Hauerwas, Stanley and David Burrell: "From System to Story. An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics" in: Hauerwas and Jones: *Why Narrative?* (p.158-190). These texts are both quite early in Hauerwas's work, but the basic strands of what I oppose are already operative.

²⁵⁸ I would at this stage like to point out that while Hauerwas is an interesting, sophisticated and nuanced thinker (although I often disagree with him), this is not always the case with those who are influenced by the turn to character in ethics. Much popular (often Christian) use of the concept of character, particularly in circles of "the religious right" in the United States, tends towards a reactionary, moralistic and foundationalist view on what it means to "have (or develop) character". Taking for granted the value of one's own national, moral and religious traditions and narratives, and never truly challenging the stories we tell and are shaped by, can be dangerous. Such appropriations of character ethics are, unfortunately easy to make if one does not question the problem of moral authority: *on what conditions* can we evaluate the authority, or persuasive power, of moral concepts such as "good" or "bad" with respect to character?

²⁵⁹ Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.11.

²⁶⁰ Hauerwas: "From System to Story", p.159-161.

in which a person's beliefs and intentions are as important as his or her actions. Character is therefore qualified (established as "good" or "bad") through the agent's active acquiring of a moral history, and further: being able to tell the story of his or her life as a coherent narrative (or not). For him, "[t]he idea of character (...) involves in the most fundamental way the relation between thought and action."²⁶¹ It is important to Hauerwas that this individual's moral history cannot be understood outside of its narratively shaped context: "One is not an agent in a vacuum, just as one cannot act in a vacuum. There are no pure agents or pure acts, but only this agent and act in this particular time and place."²⁶² The embeddedness of the self in a particular story is thus fundamental to Hauerwas. There is no "view from nowhere". However, in order to counter relativism and to highlight the self as a being that "in some sense has control over himself"²⁶³, Hauerwas points to the ability to identify one's traditions, and the importance of evaluating the narratives of which one is a part. This is necessary, because, as Hauerwas says: "...we can choose to determine ourselves in terms of certain kinds of descriptions rather than others."²⁶⁴ Such a determining choice must involve a capacity for assessment of the stories we tell about ourselves and our contexts.

However, several critics of a narrativist view point out that such evaluation is difficult if *all* reality and personhood is interpreted in the category of narrative. Must there not be an external point of view from which the stories and traditions can be evaluated and judged to be good or bad? One such criticism is voiced by the theologian Gene Outka. He asks if it is possible for a narrative ethicist to take into an account "an 'I' who stands outside any given story"²⁶⁵. Many with him see such an "I" to be necessary in order to counter the relativity of ethics, which, according to this view, is unavoidable if morality is formed only in and by stories. The conclusion is often that, although narrative is helpful in order to assess what is at stake in a given situation and to understand certain aspects of moral anthropology and culture, a narrativist view is *not* sufficient when it comes to countering relativism. Evaluation of what is right or wrong, good or evil, in situations of public interaction in a pluralist society where different cultures and narratives are a reality, demands a capacity for stepping out of particular stories.

²⁶¹ Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.230.

²⁶² Same book, p.102.

²⁶³ Same book, p.12.

²⁶⁴ Same book, p.128.

²⁶⁵ Outka quoted in Barbieri: "Ethics and the Narrated Life", p.370.

At this stage I encounter a certain aspect of the problem of free will and autonomy: must free will be understood as a freedom from context – breaking loose from character, or should it rather be interpreted as the degree of consciousness of one’s embeddedness in narrative?²⁶⁶ Does autonomy necessarily require disengagement (freedom) from narrative? I do not think so. We cannot evaluate our narratives from a disengaged, un-embodied perspective. Our rational and interpretative categories are culturally formed through and dependent on narrative. We cannot escape time and place. This does not, however, mean that we are unwittingly and unreflectively imposed upon by external rules or foundational premises for judgement in situations that demand moral action. An important distinction between a narrativist and a non-narrativist understanding of autonomy concerns how one understands the individual. In short, critics of a narrativist view question the possibility of autonomy if the individual is determined by the narratives by which she is formed. Critics of a non-narrative view, on the other hand, question the possibility of seeing the individual as decontextualised and free to make “objective”, rational judgements.

The debate on free will and autonomy is thus centred on the reflective possibility of the “I”. Such reflectivity is often seen as *either* dependent on being outside story (Outka), *or* inside story (Hauerwas). I shall argue that there is a wider range of alternatives. First, though, I agree with Hauerwas that it is not possible (or even desirable, ethically speaking) to seek the point of view of an “I” outside of narrative. I certainly do not consider it a necessary condition for reflexivity. However, the real ethical question at stake is *how* the issue of the reflective “I” affects that of autonomy. A non-narrativist view of autonomy requires an reflective and thereby authoritative “I” *above* narrative. For a narrativist, the question is more complicated: by which authority can an “I” *in* narrative represent a critical voice with regard to the stories in which it is embedded, thus ensuring some degree of freedom from determinism, and, following this, autonomy for the moral subject?

The issue of autonomy is therefore closely linked to the problem of moral authority. This claim can be clarified by a return to the definition of moral authority which was developed in

²⁶⁶ An excellent discussion of narrative, freedom and agency can be found in Nelson: *Narrative and Morality*, p.34-37. He brings in an illustrative metaphor from the sociologist Peter Berger, who sees our social roles in relation to puppets in a puppet-theatre. Unlike puppets, we can perceive the machinery by which we are moved. Nelson uses the metaphor to discuss narrative and freedom, and asks: “Is perceiving the “strings” by which stories exert their influence a sufficient (as well as necessary) condition for asserting our freedom? Or is it the case that in order to be free we must be able to reach up and cut the strings?” (p.36).

Chapter 2, that by ‘moral authority’ I mean 1) *The substantial content of a moral concept which on a wide basis can convincingly be seen to be true, and 2) which motivates and empowers the moral agent to act in accordance with it.* The first part of the definition has to do with the authority which a substantial moral language and consciousness provides with regard to the second part, namely the motivation and empowerment of the agent. The second part of the definition has to do with the authority with which a moral agent acts, if he or she acts in accordance with what he or she holds to be substantially true and good. Further, the *reasons* for such authoritative action and conviction must be internal and substantial, not external and formal, which, in part, means that these reasons must have been integrated in the agent’s narrative. They must be the agent’s own reasons as much as the actions must be his or her own. Such substance of reason for moral truth and action is, I have argued (and shall argue further), primarily developed in and as a dynamic of narrative. The developing authority of moral concepts (such as ‘good’) thus consists of a dynamic motion at several levels of context and narrative: one aspect concerns language and its substantial meaning, and one concerns the relation between our language and the actions we perform. For the agent to act with authority, its autonomy must be secured. Thus, the oscillation between the two intertwined aspects of the definition provides the necessary internal reflective perspective in order to ensure the autonomy and authority of the agent. Further, the interaction between the two perspectives on authority concerning the reflective agent and his or her action can be seen as a movement internal to character. This important point will gradually be developed further.

In continuation of the argument concerning reflexivity, authority and autonomy, it can be helpful to recap the view which was presented earlier: that authority is not to be understood in hierarchical terms, but as interaction between different nodes in a network. I suggested then, with the help of Bakhtin, that the internal authority of a narrative is dependent on dialogue between voices – including those external voices who *enter* the dialogue, and thereby serve to de-centre and destabilize any given perspective. The view I have argued for, is, therefore, dynamic and deeply relational. As well as being influenced by the voice of Bakhtin, my position is developed on the basis of a Ricoeurian radical hermeneutic, in which difference is seen as truly pluralistic and sometimes incommensurable, not as a dichotomy to be dispensed with. Indebted though I am to Hauerwas (and MacIntyre), I hold that their – and many other narrative ethicists’ – views falter somewhat as they try to establish some sort of hierarchy of narrative by which to secure the autonomy of the individual. I hope to show how such an attempt can be supplemented and challenged from the point of view of a radically relational view of

the individual, of narrative, and thus: of moral authority. In the remainder of the present chapter I shall explain in further detail why and how. This discussion involves a shifting perspective with respect to narrative ethics: sometimes I “side” with it against a non-narrativist position, at other times the line of debate runs along the distinction between dichotomic and pluralistic views on difference, in which I position myself in opposition to main-stream narrative ethics as well as to non-narrativist views.

Returning to Hauerwas, then, it is important that the idea of character provides a certain reflective possibility with regard to narrative, as has already been indicated. First of all: central to the idea of character, is that there is no “true self”, or decontextualised rationality, behind character or outside of narrative.²⁶⁷ Although the “I” of Hauerwas’s character is never independent of story, an element of critical evaluation is implied in the insistence that a moral subject’s character (and thus, determinating narrative) is, to some extent, chosen by the particular agent. Character as idea, therefore, is distinguishable from psychological traits (or the self which is formed by a particular society), in that character is *self-determination*, thus differing from a “natural self”: “...it is by having reasons and forming our actions accordingly that our character is at once formed and revealed.”²⁶⁸ This, Hauerwas says, is clearly observable in a pluralistic society, in which there are multiple stories by which we can – and do – determine ourselves: “In one respect our social context is forcing us as never before to become free and to take responsibility for our character.”²⁶⁹ In this descriptive account, Hauerwas implies that there are “agents” (represented in the quoted passage by the “our” and “us”) who determine character, by becoming free and taking responsibility.

‘Responsibility’ is a key normative word in this quotation, and ‘free’ is another. Both serve to differentiate between character and narrative, and character and traits. For in order to be responsible, i.e. to choose the moral history with which one identifies oneself and which one acts upon, one must necessarily be free and able to evaluate narratives. But from what point of view? Does not Hauerwas’s position, after all, demand a point of view external to any singular or particular narrative, a position from which the choices can be taken? The agent’s point of view (which he argues strongly in favour of²⁷⁰), ends up being that of an agent *external* to character (although, as we shall see, not necessarily external to all narrative). His argument is circular, in that the character is what provides the distancing capacity to choose between nar-

²⁶⁷ Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.115.

²⁶⁸ Same book, p.115.

²⁶⁹ Same book, p.103n.

²⁷⁰ Same book, p.31.

ratives, but at the same time, that character is the result of a chosen narrative by which the agent is formed.

A kinder version of the point made above, however, is to call the relation between character and reason/action (the agent's narrative history, connecting past and present) a dual vision. The circularity (or duality) of his argument does, in fact, reflect what most of us experience as a complex truth of reality: namely the non-linear relationships between experience and reflection, between story and interpretation, and between individual and community. If we truly consider our experiences, however, we know that we *do* have the capacity to reflect. We can to some extent "step aside" from our emotions, thoughts and narratives, and evaluate them critically. But although the reflective motion does not necessarily have narrative form (we can think in other forms), it is important to be aware that any "second thought" we have takes shape within particular cultural and individual narratives. What is most important here, however, for both Hauerwas and me, is that reflectiveness is never an disembodied experience. "Stepping aside" from narrative, or "stepping back" (which is Hauerwas's term²⁷¹) is *not* the same as "stepping outside" narrative.

Does this mean, then, that whenever we step "aside" or "back", we necessarily find ourselves in a different, or maybe extended narrative? Hauerwas attempts to solve the problem of reflexivity by saying that yes, we *do* see our narratives in the light of our other narratives, and yes, there *is* an ultimate grand narrative. For him, the Christian narrative is such an overarching story in which Christians can and ought to determine themselves.²⁷² As a gift to humanity,²⁷³ this Biblical story cannot be relativized, although people's interpretations and appropriations of it can be manifold.²⁷⁴ And as much as we *are* our histories and we *are* our con-

²⁷¹ Same book, p.124.

²⁷² In fact, Hauerwas's insistence on the normativity of the Christian narrative implies that every human being ought to determine him- or herself according to this story. Given the fact that not everyone does, it does not follow for him that one should adhere to the liberal strategy of imagining that one can (or should) step out of one's narrative in order to find a "neutral" ground for coping with ethical decisions in a pluralist society. Thus, Hauerwas's narrative project is, from an internal point of view, most certainly not a relativist one. It is exactly *this* that provides his liberal critics with their most severe stumbling block.

²⁷³ "The Christian life is always "external" to our being, for it cannot be thought of as an achievement of our own since it can come only as gift." Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.82.

²⁷⁴ This normative non-relativity of a given narrative provides Hauerwas with his argument against the liberal ideal of a "free" and "objective" determination of morality and politics. We are context bound, but are in some ways free to choose our narratives. Having *chosen* to be formed by the Christian narrative, however, one must necessarily consider the Church as the community where Christian morality and public life is shaped. Further, this provides the Christian with both an imperative to, and a possibility of, speaking freely *qua* Christian in and into public society.

texts, we are *free* (and therefore autonomous): for as characters, we have had (some degree of) choice in determining which grand narrative to attend to. This is Hauerwas's central argument against relativism, and his reason for the impossibility of stepping outside a particular narrative: there *is* nowhere to step. The image of the ever-expanding universe is, in my view, a suitable metaphor by which to visualize this.²⁷⁵ Thus, from the point of view of the individual agent, its context (in both time and space) is "infinite". If this metaphor provides a plausible interpretation of Hauerwas, it can serve to highlight what I find to be a problematic consequence of Hauerwas's position. The combination of his attempt to establish a relational self which cannot be understood outside of context, *and* the claim that ethics must have its starting point in the agent's point of view, *and* the insistence that no objective truth "outside of narrative" exists, means that he ends up with a view of the individual as being the centre of the universe. The important question then becomes: can such an individual be considered as a relational being?

Hauerwas writes about relationality: "The self is not an absolute entity in itself, but is relational in its very essence."²⁷⁶ The individual is shaped by, and in, its cultural context(s), and cannot be thought of outside this fundamental narrative formation. Furthermore, it is central to each person's development that the construction of his or her own story happens as a response to what is "other" to him or herself. The journey of one's life towards one's telos thus corresponds to the gradual shaping of the narrative of a good life for the particular individual. And, as I have shown, the conscious formation of character involves deliberation as to which narratives one chooses to define oneself by. Character is therefore not, according to Hauerwas, given, but takes shape, is defined and discerned as one's own narrative interacts with that of every other person and culture one meets in life.

Earlier in the thesis I discussed several aspects of relationality, and these are helpful towards shedding some light on what I argue are limitations to Hauerwas's view. The central problem, as I see it, is that his understanding of relation posits "self" as fundamentally different to "other", thus focusing on the structural dichotomy between the narratives (remember the im-

²⁷⁵ Many of us have as children written ourselves into the grand structure of the world by giving our addresses ever expanding dimensions (which can be imagined as corresponding to "dimensions" of narrative identity): Maud Eriksen, Diagnosvägen 15, Flemingsberg, Stockholm, Sweden, Europe, Tellus, The Milky Way, The Universe... A different structural element of identity is not space, but time. My history defines who I am – and a grand narrative of my history can be identified in lineage: I am Maud Marion, daughter of Janet Marion, daughter of Florence Marion, daughter of Frances Florence and so on.

²⁷⁶ Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.120.

age of the poles of a battery in Part II?). On the other hand, a radical hermeneutic understanding concentrates on the *tension* between what is different (...the power from a battery). Dialogic difference is therefore *more* than just being “opposite”. With respect to relationality, then, I suggest that an important distinction must be made between ‘self’ being *defined* by ‘the other’, and ‘self’ *becoming* in relation to ‘the other’. The Ricoeurian reciprocity of “one-self *as* another” (which represents the idea of an oscillation *within* narrative between different perspectives from which the self sees) cannot actually occur in the framework of Hauerwas’s relationality. Therefore, neither true dialectic identification nor tension between self and other can happen. In a discussion on action, Hauerwas does say that we experience both the active and passive – things *happen* to us.²⁷⁷ However, the perspective is always from the monolithic individual agent’s point of view. I ask: is the difference between the “I” and the “Thou” fundamental (as in the work of Emmanuel Levinás), or is it by understanding character as simultaneously *same and different* (depending on perspective) that we can best understand what it means to be an essentially relational being? I grant Hauerwas’s view that we cannot understand ourselves outside of our particular contexts and their narratives. In time and space there are other people and other cultures through which we are defined. These are essential to who we are. However, as I argue in this chapter, an important aspect of the alternative I present to a main-stream, post-liberal or communitarian understanding of narrative ethics and character, involves a *deeper* understanding of relationality than that which is implied by and inherent to the situatedness of human consciousness and being.

With respect to the problems of reflexivity as well as relationality, Hauerwas’ problem, as I see it, is that he does not adequately achieve what both Ricoeur and Bakhtin do, which is to establish a reflective position *within* narrative, and, as a result of this, a less static individual. Their perspectives (which I lump together here) apply to micro-narratives as well as to macro-dimensions of narrative, and to particular individuals as well as to theory about the self *as such*. Hauerwas’s reflexivity is posited as a movement *between* narratives, in that the reflective, unified (or coherence-seeking) agent must evaluate a narrative from the perspective of *another* narrative in which he or she *also* is part. Or, in the case of relationality (not reflexivity), we can see how the dichotomic otherness of narrative is implied in a claim such as this: “...we are selves only because another self was first present to us.”²⁷⁸ He therefore never

²⁷⁷ Same book, p. 104.

²⁷⁸ Same book, p. 33.

quite manages to find an adequate image of his narratively constituted idea of character which can seriously *include* the reflective “I”.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic understanding of both narrative and character, on the other hand, is internally dynamic (I have discussed how Ricoeur develops this in the split-self tension of *idem* and *ipse*, whose dynamics can best be interpreted by turning to narrative). Bakhtin’s use of the aural metaphor of polyphony conveys the same complexity. External (monologic) voices enter a complex dialogue internal to the narrative (or, more precisely in this context, the narrative of the reflective and relational agent). Thus, they both provide accurate terminology and fertile metaphors by which we can understand the destabilization, or internal critique, of narrative and the individual *as character*. A key metaphor here is spatial. Ricoeur and Bakhtin both provide images of a self who becomes de-centred because of the dialogue between perspectives *within* the narrative. This differs from Hauerwas’s centring of the agent’s perspective, whose (internal) voice remains monologic.

I have now attempted to establish a distinction between a dichotomic and pluralist view of difference, and to illuminate some of the consequences this has for understanding reflexivity and relationality as relevant to character ethics.²⁷⁹ In continuation of this, I will turn to some further aspects of this theme, concentrating on alternative strategies for the way in which to handle such difference. First and foremost, I question Hauerwas’s opinion that to acquire character is to seek unity, or coherence, in the face of a variety of actions and narratives.

Unity (in contrast to wholeness) as the dominant ideal for development of character, I shall argue, is problematic in relation to reflexivity in narrative character ethics. Says Hauerwas:

The ethics of character is concerned with the self’s duration, growth and unity. The moral good cannot be limited to the self’s external conformity to moral rules or ideals; goodness is a way of being that which brings unity to the variety of our activities.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ I need to clarify here the kind of plurality am I speaking about. Earlier, I referred to Hauerwas’s use of the phrase “pluralistic society”, which I understand in a descriptive, social sense. The difference between a dichotomic and pluralist view of difference is relevant at a deeper level than the descriptive. Fundamentally, it is the plurality of perspectives internal to the moral self to which I refer. This does not *necessarily* involve a realist conception of pluralism as having referential existence. There are, however, different degrees of such pluralism. Sometimes difference is apparent, whereas sometimes it is experienced as “real” at a deeper level and has consequences as such. What is relevant, therefore, is the view that we experience a continuum of degrees of plurality, which ultimately involves a “radical pluralism”. Such radical plurality is represented in our lives by experiences of the incommensurable, i.e. of different perspectives which cannot, even in theory, be transcended. (This claim is valid no matter how one defines “existence”, for instance as construction versus referential existence).

²⁸⁰ Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p.179. This is similar to what MacIntyre says, that “The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest”. MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p.219.

In seeing narrative as a unifying quest, Hauerwas does not sufficiently highlight what I hold to be necessary, namely the continuous *tension* between perspectives internal to a narratively interpreted life. Whereas I am sympathetic to Hauerwas's insight that moral good is not about conforming to external rules/ideals (thereby retaining the significance of autonomy), I find that the quest for internal unity belongs within the paradigm of a hermeneutic strategy in which difference is seen as dichotomic, not pluralistic.²⁸¹ The ideal of life, as well as morality, is ultimately coherence. (Moral) growth is about "transcending difference", or in other words: seeking unity between the different narratives of one's life. The ideal "good character", therefore, has no "split" between the external rules and its various activities. The concept of character thus ultimately presupposes a movement towards a monistic reality, an overcoming of difference, a Gadamerian "fusion of horizons". However, because such fusion is, in reality, impossible, the "good character" cannot exist. Even understood as telos, 'good' becomes a formally given, unambiguous (unified) and static normative aim.

Speaking from within the Christian narrative, which Hauerwas insists we do²⁸², the issue of incoherence/unity can also be spoken of in terms of sin (understood as broken relationships with God, self and creation) and reconciliation. Unity, or reconciliation with God, is an eschatological telos, the coherent goal of a journey. Furthermore, sin is, theologically speaking, an inherent aspect of being human. It makes sense then, in terms of Hauerwas's narrative, that the human self understood in terms of character as well as sin, cannot (in practice) develop fully into coherence (or, if we focus the moral aspect of sin: cannot become "good").²⁸³ To a

²⁸¹ Cf. Part II, Chapter 5 (as well as above).

²⁸² Again, the "we" here is with reference to his normative call to *all* of humanity, regardless of whether or not one includes oneself in the "we". In the following, I try to retain a linguistic awareness of the fact that although I can speak as a Christian theologian, I do not necessarily include a reader in an occasional subjective "we". I am, as a voice in the present text, not neutral, but my voice is constantly posed as 'other' to those of partners in dialogue, which includes an "otherness" of my own when I speak from within the variety of perspectives that the multidisciplinarity of the thesis offers.

²⁸³ Hauerwas discusses many aspects of theological importance in *Character and the Christian Life*, in particular in Part V: "Sanctification and the Ethics of Character". A further discussion on my part of his theological ethics is not a task of this thesis. However, in his introduction to the revised edition of the book (1985), he responds to critics of his work. At one point in particular, his comments are relevant here, as he accentuates even more than in the original edition the importance of the relation between the Christian *telos* and *character*, and writes, in response to Gilbert Meilaender: "Meilaender suggests that there is an inevitable tension between the pictures of the Christian life as dialogue and as a journey that cannot and should not be overcome. This strikes me as what a good Lutheran should say – namely, that it is crucial to keep the two metaphors in dialectical tension so that the full range of Christian existence is before us. But I am not a good Lutheran, and I want to argue that the metaphor of the journey is and surely should be the primary one for articulating the shape of Christian existence and living. Put in philosophical terms, the underlying contention of this book is that the moral life, and in particular the Christian moral life, requires a teleological conception of human existence that gets

certain extent, I find that much of what Hauerwas says here makes good sense. However, later, in Part VI, I shall return to some further discussions of what my grappling with character, in life and literature, can contribute to an understanding of theological ethics, which ultimately is a quest to understand God's will for humanity. Suffice it to say here: the Trinitarian God is not a simple, unified, unambiguous being. And I believe that this has consequences for how (we as) Christians theologically interpret (our-) themselves, ethics, and the problem of moral authority. As I argue, through Ricoeur and Bakhtin, and with the help of Murdoch as both philosopher and novelist, the conditions that inform my treatment of such issues as character, narrative and ethics, lead to a somewhat different way of thinking about God and God's will for humanity than those assumed by Hauerwas.

As an alternative articulation of how to cope with difference, I return to how Ricoeur uses narrative as a sophisticated metaphor in order to speak intelligibly and inclusively about the incommensurable and paradoxical aspects of life, *as well as* seeing storytelling as a quest for coherence (a point which in itself illustrates internal tension).²⁸⁴ Such a double motion of sameness and difference is not present in Hauerwas's work.²⁸⁵ By clarifying the different hermeneutic strategies used by the thinkers I have studied, the problem becomes more transparent.²⁸⁶ With a radical (non-dichotomic) hermeneutic interactive understanding of difference (inspired by Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch), many voices contribute *within* narrative (and character): for instance, the internal and external, the dynamics of self *as* another, the 'I' as 'agent' and 'sufferer'. Together, they represent a multitude of reflective positions internal to the narrative, as I discussed above. The point of view from which to evaluate narrative is thus found within the inherent incommensurability of narrative itself (provided narrative is understood as a polyphonic dialogue, or as deeply and irreducibly pluralistic – in which the perspectives stand in dynamic tension with one another). Thus, returning to arguments against the demand to "step out" of narrative in order to establish a reflective position, I prefer not reduce this to the insight that "there is nothing there", as this ultimately necessitates a mono-

somewhere rather than forever being a movement between "back and forth"." Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, (Introduction to revised edition) p.xxix.

²⁸⁴ On my own account, I would add that this can be seen quite clearly in the battle between form and content in literature, more so than in "reality".

²⁸⁵ Cf. the footnote above, in which Hauerwas argues against Meilaender that journey is a better metaphor than dialogue.

²⁸⁶ Ricoeur says about his book that its structure is also the structure of the argument for a Hermeneutics of Selfhood. What he says about the book in this respect, is therefore also about his theory: the unity of his text and in his argument is "not the unity that an ultimate foundation would confer to a series of derivative disciplines. It is merely analogical unity between the multiple uses of the term 'acting'(...)." Ricoeur: *Oneself as Another*, p.19.

lithic, unified self at the centre, as well as an (ideally) finalized telos. I prefer to turn to the hermeneutic and relational model of narrative, which means *letting the reflective perspectives in*.²⁸⁷ Such reflective voices, or perspectives, can come from many places, and are not necessarily coherent. They can be rules, other people's stories, new experiences in my own life, religious truth that I attest, encounters with a multitude of cultural narratives within which I live and learn – and so forth.

To conclude this discussion on coherence and unity, it is important to remember that Ricoeur and Bakhtin both speak in terms of the human telos as *unfinalizable*. We cannot “see” or “understand” our telos. This is not because it has not been revealed to us in full, but because it always is and always will be in the making. The argument that unity, or coherence is not the sole aim of a hermeneutic process, or of the journey toward wisdom, is not to say that the two thinkers idealize fragmentation (and nor do I). On the contrary. However, they (each in their own way) acknowledge that multiplicity and difference are phenomena which we experience as true and real, and that these are valuable and necessary aspects of coming to terms with reality and self. The question, therefore, is how to handle the double quest of seeking unity on the one hand, and not only accepting, but actually *valuing* plurality on the other hand.

To suggest an answer, I can turn towards the study of literature to see if, for instance, literary language, plots and characters can help us clarify our vision, and thus help us see what is at stake in real life narratives. Throughout the literary analysis of Part III, I identified an important motif in the many structures of *Sameness and Difference* throughout the text. Rather than

²⁸⁷ There is an important difference between seeing the voice, or perspective, of the Other as on the one hand “entering” the reflexive self and on the other: “added to” in order to secure a socially reflective self. Ricoeur says that “otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but (...) belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood (...)” *Oneself as Another*, p.317. Implied in this is a critique of a dichotomic view of otherness that for instance Levinás represents.

Helen Andersson writes about the difference between the two thinkers. She points out that Ricoeur understands ‘self’ as *intrasubjective*, whereas Levinás has an *intersubjective* view of ‘self’ – and argues in favour of the latter: in an exposure to the face of the radical ‘other’, is an otherness that cannot be reduced to an aspect of ‘selfhood’. For Andersson, this represents a less harmonizing ideal than what Ricoeur subscribes to. To a degree I hold that Andersson has a valid point, but not that the consequence of Ricoeur’s view represents a quest for conflation of difference, a simple model of relationality in which the ideal is friendship and harmony. That I focus on the difference between pluralist and dichotomic understanding of difference, is because I believe (with Ricoeur) that it is precisely in the incommensurability of pluralistic difference that the otherness of the other *is* secured. Such difference is always ‘other’, but in an encounter, the otherness *enters* (is not added to) the “tenor of meaning” and the “ontological constitution of selfhood”. I do not *define myself* in relation to ‘other’. Rather, I change, I *become* through integrating the incommensurable otherness of the ‘other’ in an internal *ten-sion* (not fusion) with ‘self’. (See Andersson: *Det etiska projektet och det estetiska*, p.42-49).

speaking about coherence, or unity in the novel, I suggest that ‘integration’ is a better concept with respect to the reality of plurality.²⁸⁸ Integration does not conflate difference. It does not posit a final, in theory (if not in practice) reachable telos, but is *in itself* unfinalizable. However, the orientation of a process of integration is nevertheless directed *away* from fragmentation. Also, with respect to a theological interpretation, disintegration thus becomes is a metaphor by which to speak about sin in terms of an active, continuous process which, in my mind, generates more fruitful discussions and understanding than Hauerwas’s view of sin as opposite to either coherence (incoherence) or unity (disunity), which to some extent imply static conditions.

With respect to character, plurality of perspective is a precondition for reflexivity. Thus, a pluralism of perspectives breeds round, complex characters (internal dialogism). A lack of internal perspectivism, on the other hand, produces flat characters (external monologism). ‘Unified character’ is hard to distinguish from a moral agent who falls prey either to relativism (no reflexivity), to determinism (no freedom), or to individualism (no internal ‘other’). A plurality of perspectives is thus fundamental for any ethical dialogue. Ultimately then, it is not primarily the study of the plurality of relations *between* narratives, but *within* narrative, that provides the work I do in this thesis with an opening towards challenging a dichotomic, somewhat static and hierarchical understanding of authority, and moving towards interpreting moral authority in terms of pluralism, perspectivism and discerning dialogue.

13.5. A Summarizing Pause

I have now attempted to show the ways in which several thinkers have concerned themselves with the concept of character, and also how they understand the substantial content of the term. In the analyses and discussions of Rimmon-Kenan, Ricoeur, Bakhtin and Murdoch, I have found several important structural similarities between the different views. *Rimmon-Kenan* (following *Chatman*) develops a theory in which he stresses the ambiguity inherent in the difference between mimetic and semiotic readings of a novel (story versus text). He points to the necessity of differentiation between levels of reading, so as to not confuse the literary

²⁸⁸ Linguistic usage from the arena of public society can possibly cast some light on the subtle differences between concepts that I am trying to develop constructively in this context. An important debate concerning how societies are to handle the increasing plurality which arises from immigration, can be heard to run along the line of an ideal of “assimilation” versus “integration”. Assimilation with respect to cultural diversity means that the homogenous society is seen as ideal, whereas “integration” is seen as a strategy to uphold an ideal of the heterogeneous society. Further, “coherence” as ideal would, as I see it, be counter to true respect for real difference. It corresponds to a modern understanding of political society, not to a postmodern interpretation.

construction of character traits and portrayals of action with real life. *Ricoeur* has provided us with the possibility of focusing on the distinction in character between recognizable character traits over time (idem-identity) and idiosyncratic behaviour in actual context (idem-identity). Further, his thoughts on narrative and plot provide us with tools to handle issues of identity and changeability in relational terms. *Bakhtin's* primary contribution concerns the use of "character-zones" as a means to distinguish between external (monologic) and internal (dialogic) persuasion – or authority. *Murdoch's* reflections on the relative freedom of characters also reflects a dual structure. Her distinction between literary form and the contingent formlessness of real life is one of many helpful images with respect to the upcoming reading of Tallis and Julius as *types* and *individuals*.

These thinkers from different fields all contribute with more or less constructive perspectives to my thesis, which serve to widen the horizon as I now proceed to the literary character analysis. The constructive contributors in the chapter on ethics and character do all – in some way or another – operate with one or more complex relational structures in their understanding of character. Such relational models often reflect the ambiguous duality of sameness and difference which has been a recurring motif throughout *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and provide more powerful means to understand the distinction I make between reading the characters in the novel as *types* versus *individuals*. However, the arguments above have had different aims, and their contexts have also varied. This multiplicity serves as a provider of several different perspectives which open up new vistas in this study of character and moral authority.

The discussion of character in the context of contemporary ethics has had a somewhat different structure and scope than the preceding chapters on character. *Hauerwas* (as a representative of a main-stream position within theological narrative ethics) has been introduced from a critical point of view. His work provides an important context for mine, but not in a particularly constructive sense. Although I agree with him to some extent, there are several areas in which I disagree with him. The main aspect of my critique is that I oppose the dichotomic approach to difference and narrative, and argue in favour of a dynamic ditto. I see Hauerwas's position as problematic, primarily because he does not acknowledge what I have found to be of great importance, namely the deeply relational understanding of selfhood. Because of this, he (counter-intentionally) operates with too much of a distinction between the individual and the community, and also an unrealistic optimism with regard to how much the individual can escape his or her embeddedness in context. His view on narrative and character does not, in

my opinion, do much to destabilize already given and authoritative understandings of moral concepts such as ‘good’ or ‘evil’.

The critique of the post-liberal Lindbeckian understanding of hermeneutics (the Yale-school as opposed to the Chicago-school in which David Tracy is central) which was performed in my chapter on hermeneutics in Part II, parallels my present critique of the position of many narrativists who have advocated the concept of ‘character’ as fundamental to ethics. In part, the chapter on Hauerwas has shown how various understandings of difference and hermeneutic strategies will influence the degree of sophistication with respect to the deep relationality that I hold to be of fundamental value as an anthropological basis for a rethinking of moral authority. The presentation of an ethical conception of character is thus part of an argument that relationality and context-embeddedness has not been sufficiently integrated in many forms of narrative ethics. In the forthcoming chapters, all the above serves as a subtext for my interpretation and discussion of literary character and moral authority.

13.6. Moving on to an Analysis of Characters

a) Approaching the Literary Analysis

All the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* are integral to the story, and therefore to the forthcoming analysis as well (although I will focus specifically on Tallis, Julius and Morgan). The previous chapters have shown how important it is that the characters can be studied and understood from different points of view simultaneously. In the following section, I shall discuss some further aspects of this twofoldness, and its consequences for the discussion of the novel.

First of all, the characters are important in themselves, for their individual person-like qualities and actions, and thus their part in the story. Most of them are in one way or another central to the development of the actual plot, which is – to a large extent – psychological. Murdoch’s characters are often elusive, confusing and internally contradictory. This, however, does not discredit them as characters. In fact, the lack of singular narrative strands enhances their authoritative credibility, and further, provides access to an understanding of selfhood which corresponds to aspects of the moral anthropologies I have identified first and foremost in Ricoeur and Murdoch, but also in Bakhtin – and somewhat in opposition to Hauerwas and MacIntyre, who seek a deeper coherence as a “test” of narrative credibility. It is *precisely* because of the characters’ complexity that they function as adequate, more or less mimetic, portraits of humans. Their strangeness can therefore be deeply realistic, as real people are com-

plex creatures, and cannot be explained simply or once and for all – by total integration in one narrative strand.

Secondly, I have found that the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* are, to a certain extent, stereotypic representations, or personifications, of ideas. The use of symbolism and metaphoric language in this novel contributes to the characterization of the characters, thereby providing deeper access to analysis of their storylines, role and function in the story. At this symbolic level, fiction differs from real life, and that one must remember that fiction is art, in which reality is represented by aesthetic form.

The question of literary realism with respect to the characters' credibility is therefore twofold: on the one hand, they represent the "messy jumble of human life". On the other hand, they represent culturally given images which are "real" in a different sense. Heusel's apt title of a study of some of Murdoch's novels is *Patterned Aimlessness*. The phrase illustrates this duality in the construction of Murdoch's novelistic universe – including its "inhabitants". An important aspect of the textual characterization of the characters, is the use of intertextual references. From reading literary criticism where *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is discussed, and through various internet searches, it is interesting to see how serious critics, commented bibliographies, book-shop presentations of the novel, student essays, articles and other texts, all use a variety of such intertextual references to present the novel, particularly with reference to the characters. Julius "is" Satan, Beelzebub, The Demiurge, Lord of the Flies, Iago, Prospero, Mephistopheles, and several other variants of the personification of evil. Tallis "is" Christ, Job, The Good Samaritan, Aloysha from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and so forth. Even Murdoch herself has said the following about the characters: "Tallis is the Christ figure (...) Julius (...) the Prince of Darkness, King of this world (...) Morgan is the human soul over whom they are disputing."²⁸⁹

Heusel points out that this intertextuality is part of the dialogic style of the novel.²⁹⁰ By using abundant literary references, the character's various prefigurations come to life both as suppliers of connotative richness, and as being *other* to the particular actions and actual voices in the novel. This is an integral part of the focus of the present analysis. The close reading illuminated that it is precisely the juxtaposition of expectation (pre-text) and experience (novel-text) which brings to life this complex portrayal of good, evil and humanity. For instance, Tallis "as" Christ is a deeply ambivalent symbol, as it is just as much the inversion of the fig-

²⁸⁹ Murdoch quoted in Spear: *Iris Murdoch*, p.68.

²⁹⁰ Heusel: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels*, p.159.

uration as the likeness to it which is interesting. This, too, is a way of creating dialogism within the text. In addition to intertextuality, the textual presence of what Bakhtin calls the “carnavalesque” serves as the refraction of what is known, or obvious. Distortions of the known intertextual references (which are often funny or grotesque) bring different points of view into play, thus casting new light on what is “true”, or “real”.

This same point comes across from another angle in the different readings of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* by Rabinowitz and Conradi. Rabinowitz takes a rather narrow position on the Murdochian characters in his *New York Times* review, in which he points out that “the personalities of her characters grow blurry as the ideas they represent come into focus.”²⁹¹ Conradi, on the other hand, characterizes the novel on the whole as open and realistic in contrast to the closed novels, in which there is a stronger didactic and formal quality to the construction.²⁹² The closed novels, he says, are more explicitly “idea-novels”. The characters in these are set in the context of exploring a certain single philosophical world view by which they are bound. In this manner, *Under the Net*, the first novel is Wittgensteinian, *A Severed Head* is Existentialist, and *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is a laboratory of Freudian psychology.²⁹³ In opposition to such constructions, Conradi says of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, that it is “research into the substantiality of the self (...) the characters are alive, and alive through the relationships which define them, and by virtue of which they exist”.²⁹⁴

By use of the concept of polyphony, I believe that both Rabinowitz and Conradi’s readings are valid to a certain extent, but that none can be left as a “final” reading. Although the characters represent ideas and can therefore seem stereotypical, or stock figures (however interesting this may be), they are simultaneously portraits of idiosyncratic and ambiguous humanity. In the novel a polyphonic world is represented, in which there is on the one hand a symbolic structuredness in life, a certain degree of universality of human life existence (and thus morality). On the other hand, it is also true that life is contingent, muddled, painful and has no formula.²⁹⁵ The dialogue of sameness/difference which has been a recurring theme throughout

²⁹¹ Rabinowitz, Rubin: “A Fairly Honourable Defeat”. Review in: *New York Times*. February 8, 1970 (www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/20/specials/murdoch-defeat.html, 12.12.2001)

²⁹² Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p. 202. (On “open” and “closed” novels, see Conradi p.133) Conradi does not use Bakhtinian terminology in his analysis, but the closed/open-metaphor corresponds in part to the difference between the monologic and dialogic novel.

²⁹³ Murdoch, Iris: *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. London 1974.

²⁹⁴ Conradi: *The Saint and the Artist*, p.204.

²⁹⁵ The original title of the novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, is potentially open to such a double, or ambivalent interpretation, although most readers readily take it to mean that Good is defeated by Evil. The Norwegian translation of the title is *Nederlag med Ære*. The Danish translation is somewhat simi-

the novel thus also refers to several aspects of the theoretical discussion of Murdochian characters and the analysis of them. As they are ideological constructions as well as “free” characters, they therefore both correspond to and differ from the authorial voice of Murdoch herself. The Ricoeurian dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* also corresponds to this, both “internally” in the characters, and with regard to their interaction with each other.

Such ambiguity corresponds closely to what Dipple, with reference to Bakhtin, calls the “un-finalizability” of Murdoch’s work. Her literature echoes life in that “The last word about our lives cannot be written nor the final analysis achieved”.²⁹⁶ The novel can therefore be read as a laboratory in which human life reality, by being artistically represented, can be clearly envisioned, but never completely grasped. Murdoch’s characters are not only types, or ideas, caught in a single theory of what it is to be human. They are complex, free selves in relation to other selves (including their intertextual references), and are thus not easily summarized. In the forthcoming discussion of the characters, both their intelligibility and elusiveness are central. Thus, form and formlessness, type and particularity, chaos and structure, improbabilities and recognizable characteristics, are all aspects of the complex human life reality that ethicists must try to come to grips with.

I now proceed to integrate the multitude of perspectives on character, relationality and authority in a careful presentation of what each of the characters’ story can bring to *ethical* and later, theological, discourse. As already mentioned, the forthcoming discussion is primarily a study of the main characters from the point of view of their oscillation between being artistic representations of certain ideas on the one hand, and idiosyncratic personalities on the other. Before I arrive at that, however, a final detour must be made, this time entering a short discussion in order to clarify the place within the literary analysis where discussions of ethics and moral philosophy are relevant.

lar (*Æren i behold*), and they both, as does the original, reflect the possibility of a polyphonic reading. The Swedish title *Hök och duvar* (Hawk and Doves), however, is more closed. Even if the question is open as to who is who, the content of the novel in relation to the title renders it difficult *not* to interpret Julius as the “hawk” and the others as “doves”. It thus represents only one possible interpretation of the function of the characters, and corresponds to Rabinowitz’s reading of the novel as stereotypic and one-dimensional.

²⁹⁶ Dipple, Elizabeth: “The Green Knight and Other Variations of the Spirit; or, Tricks and Images for the Human Soul; or, The Uses of Imaginative Literature”. In: Antonacchio and Schweiker: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (p.138-171), p.168.

b) Approaching the Ethical Analysis

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre discusses the question of authorship in relation to our own narratives. He famously says that “we are never more (and sometimes less) than co-authors of our own narratives.”²⁹⁷ This is an often-quoted and much discussed view within the context of narrative ethics, and provides a relevant preparation of the transition from a discussion of ethical character to one of literary character. First of all, the statement presupposes MacIntyre’s conception of story as ‘there’, existing before the telling of it, so to speak: “Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction”.²⁹⁸ As part of history, as free and active agents in a practice, we do have some degree of authorship in the telling of this lived narrative form, providing it with its own, individual flavour. (This freedom is not only an empirical fact, but necessary for the narrativist in order to retain some degree of moral responsibility.) Ultimately, however, we narrate ourselves as we are determined by our traditions.²⁹⁹ Says MacIntyre: “All questions of choice arise within the framework; the framework itself therefore cannot be chosen”.³⁰⁰ Paul Nelson identifies the following problems in MacIntyre’s statement:

To assert that we are the authors of our stories would entail grand and sweeping assumptions about self-awareness, freedom, and individual autonomy. To the extent that the stories are thought to be uniquely our own, issues of individuality and uniqueness also arise. (...) On the other hand, if it is more nearly correct that we are assigned roles and inserted into a story that pre-exists our appearance and over which we have little, if any, authorial control, the place for freedom would be constricted severely.³⁰¹

For Nelson, there is a double fallacy inherent in MacIntyre’s view. Seeing the individual as author would demand a set of premises which have their foundations in a non-narrativist paradigm of decontextualized autonomy and agency. On the other hand, if MacIntyre’s insistence is true, that we have little authorial control because we are bound by tradition and play assigned roles in contexts – what then of freedom? With the concept of co-authorship, MacIntyre “straddles the issue”, says Nelson, and we have seen a similar approach in the work of Hauerwas. MacIntyre and other narrativists tend to seek harmonizing solutions to the di-

²⁹⁷ MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p. 213.

²⁹⁸ Same book, p. 212.

²⁹⁹ Hauerwas, too, makes this point: “Our beliefs (...) are not our own making, but rather we inherit them from our social context.” Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life*, p. 33. I have already discussed several aspects of difficulties which arise from this view.

³⁰⁰ MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p. 126.

³⁰¹ Nelson: *Narrative and Morality*, p. 57.

lemma of authority and agency in narrative. The attempt to “straddle the issue” echoes the Bakhtinian metaphor of trying to play an orchestral score on a keyboard – a futile project.

It should not be surprising then, that I suggest that a different strategy than co-authorship as the most appropriate to handling the complex question of authorship in real life, namely that of thinking about who the author is by help the metaphor of polyphony, where external and internal voices are in continuous and unfinalizable dialogue. The role of the speaker (the teller of the story) constantly oscillates between being active and passive. The image of different voices telling the story provides a flexible set of tools to speak about reality, whereas the idea of co-authorship of a story solves very few of the problems concerning freedom and autonomy on the one hand, embeddedness in context (or tradition) on the other, and finally, the problems of reflexivity and responsibility which hover somewhere in the middle.

What I have developed here so far are reasons for studying ethical character in terms of a more sophisticated understanding of authorship (and thereby moral authority) than MacIntyre’s suggestion that we are co-authors in our own narratives. In Chapter 6, I presented a model for reading *literary* text which highlights a methodological awareness of the dynamics of the complex relationship between author, text and reader. The main reason for using this pluralistic methodological approach is that it enables me to show how literary meaning develops in the juxtaposition of perspectives (represented by the voices involved). The interpretative perspectives from, respectively, the point of view of the author, a point of view internal to the text, and from the reader’s point of view all provide possible and relevant interpretative elements, but neither perspective can singularly guarantee a “correct” or fully valid meaning. Rather, it is precisely in this dynamic process that the direction of a meaningful interpretation of a novel (and maybe also a person’s narrative) becomes apparent. On the basis of my critique of certain aspects of a narrativist view of character in the Hauerwasian and MacIntyrian sense, I shall argue why I believe that the relational/polyphonic approach to literary analysis has relevance to ethical discourse – in particular to the discussion of the problem of moral authority. The relation between literature and ethics is, in this respect, reversible: language, images and problems developed and discussed in an ethical context can open up to deeper aspects of the literary discussion, as well as vice versa.

What is particularly interesting with respect to the question of authorship in narrative, is when MacIntyre says that “[t]he difference between imaginary characters and real ones is not in the narrative form of what they do; it is in the degree of their authorship of that form and of their

own deeds.”³⁰² MacIntyre points out an important similarity between real and imaginary characters, which is that they have the same narrative form. He continues to point out that the difference between them concerns their degree of authorship. There is, however, a problem with his argument. If, as MacIntyre has already pointed out, the “real” character is no more than a co-author of his or her narrative (i.e. has only a small degree of authorship of form and deeds), what *is* then the difference between literary and ethical character? One difference is, as we saw earlier, that a “real” character’s story is “lived before it is told”. In having said that the story exists *before* the telling of it, however, MacIntyre underestimates the interpretative nature of story-telling, by which I mean that to tell a story is to find the interpretative form, or structure, which can provide substantial experiences with some kind of meaning.³⁰³ Therefore, the question of authorship and narrative identity as developed in MacIntyre’s work cannot be understood in terms of a creative, meaning-making process. Rather, it becomes a process of discovery, a quest to find a (unified) form, a structure which is *already there*. The authority (i.e. the embodied relation between moral language and agency) of a “real” character, becomes a formal authority, in that it is about *finding* the given narrative structure which, in fact, is authorized (sic!) by tradition. Moral life for the narrativist, is therefore in a sense adherence to this given-ness of the narrative form of tradition.³⁰⁴ Although the result is a narrative particular to the agent, its meaning and telos remain, to the moral subject, external and static: “(...) it is in moving forwards from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, exists.”³⁰⁵

For a long time, ethicists have sought “true” and “formal” identifications of what it is that provides a moral agent with its moral authority (for instance reason, or God). Such authority had to be unequivocal. As I have attempted to show, this is also true of much narrative ethics. Although contributors such as Hauerwas and MacIntyre oppose universalist and rationalist theories, their search for what it is that provides authority is also a search for the un-

³⁰² MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p. 215.

³⁰³ This is not to say that “meaning” in the form of narrative is imposed on *experience* “after the act”, so to speak, for the relation is more complex than this. Our experiences are not necessarily pre-reflective, as little as our narrative interpretations necessarily provide meaning to our lives. It is, however, important to point out the difference between our experiences being thought of as intelligible *as such*, and the different (and contingent) constructive “forms” with which we think but can only with difficulty escape.

³⁰⁴ MacIntyre *does* allow for opposition to a tradition, in an attempt to secure the freedom of the self from determinism. However, such opposition must, he says, be understood in *relation* to the given tradition – in this case identified as a “bad” tradition, or at least, a tradition which needs revision and development. MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p.221.

³⁰⁵ MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p.221.

ambiguous: namely the quest for the unified “good life”. For them, authority is not ahistorical or decontextualized, but localized in story: “Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by ‘the good’ or ‘a good’ we mean that at which human beings characteristically aim.”³⁰⁶ This logic leads to narrativists seeking and fighting over the “right” (or normative) stories through which we ought to interpret our lives.³⁰⁷

A *creative* process concerning narrativity and authorship (and thus authority) differs from the “quest for discovery” above. Its hermeneutic premise is that narrative is understood as an interpretative tool, by which the author might *or might not* be able to provide meaningful structures in response to the contents of a life embedded in context. For Ricoeur, for instance, narrativity is a tool not only for understanding personal growth in terms of unity, but also for identifying plurality, discontinuity and/or paradox as *part of* such a development of self. In the discussion of Ricoeur and character, there are examples of situations in which narrative as the interpretative structure breaks down. There are instances of literature where the character “escapes” the plot. For MacIntyre, such a reading would be interpreted as unintelligible, and therefore counter to the good life. “When someone complains (...) that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a *telos*.”³⁰⁸ For Ricoeur and Murdoch (and for me), this relation is much more ambivalent, a statement that will be argued further in the context of the literary analysis.³⁰⁹ My point is that as character, as a moral agent, my authority is dependent on the telling of, and listening to, a variety of voices telling stories about my own life – as well as telling, and engaging in the stories of who, or what, is external to me. Thus, the *stories* are never my own, although I

³⁰⁶ Same book, p.148.

³⁰⁷ An example from a Norwegian context should be familiar to many of my readers, namely the quest to identify what, exactly, the story of the Norwegian cultural community *is*. I refer her to a series of public debates concerning the relation, for instance, between the state Church and society, in particular as it surfaces in issues of which cultural values Norwegian schools are to be based on. The underlying question is: “Hva er fortellingen om vår kulturarv? *What is the story of our cultural heritage?*” Many presuppose that telling the “authoritative story” will guarantee the “quality” of values of the upbringing of the next generation. Thus, a continuous fight over “The Norwegian Values” is going on between secular humanists, Christians and representatives of minority religions.

³⁰⁸ MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p. 217.

³⁰⁹ Cf. the discussion of Tallis in Part V, Chapter 14, where the point is that Tallis’s loss of plot, so to speak, is closely linked to his moral development in that it intensifies the motif of ‘unselfing’ as a moral ideal. In a Murdochian universe, the “unintelligibility” of a narrative, which MacIntyre identifies as counter to the good life, can be (and often is) a movement towards good, in that it represents *true vision*, or in other words: an acceptance of the “mess and murkiness” of reality.

can experience my life as my own “text”. Other voices enter my “text”, just as I interact with and enter other texts.

In the analysis of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* this relational dynamic is in action. Throughout the analysis, and on the basis of the discussion in the present chapter, I hope to show that the method of relational readings is applicable to “real” character as well as to literary character. The interpretative technique of studying the literary characters as *types* and *individuals* leads to a further development of the position I have identified here, in that the characters to some extent represent typologies, or given narratives, about good and evil. On the other hand, the interpretation of the characters as *individuals* enables a discussion of whether or not the narratives provide meaningful explorations of good and evil as “unfinalized” moral concepts – thus challenging our given conceptions.

With respect to “real” characters, the literary interpretation might serve as a model for an ethical process of discernment and quest for moral wisdom. It can provide language for, and images of, a creative and dialogic process towards developing what we hold to be authoritative for our moral lives. This is never an individual process, but a process which is fundamentally a result of radical relationality. Radical relationality thus counters a certain form of relativism, in that my story is never only my own. It is and must be developed with a humble awareness of the voices that enter into, as well as those that already exist in, the dialogue. The ‘self’ is always in a relationship with ‘other’, but this otherness must enter my telling of my story: a story which I cannot transcend. I am, however, responsible for letting other story-telling voices in, thus posing *me* as ‘other’. “My story” is therefore both intratext and intertext.

Further, a radical relationality does not lead to fighting over which narrative a given agent or community ought to identify with, as the fundamental embeddedness in context (i.e. in my own life) is interpreted at a different level than being reduced to a singular question of which communities we belong in. Finally, with a reflexive position established *within* the self the autonomy of the moral agent is retained. And with this, I re-enter the narrative of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, this time bringing with me many other moral voices into the ethical dialogue.

14. Literary Characters in Perspective

14.1. The Ideal and The Real

a) The Tasks of the Chapter

One of Murdoch's prime preoccupations both in her literary and philosophical work is to understand the search for human goodness.³¹⁰ I will, therefore, begin the character study of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* with an analysis of the "good" Tallis, and from there proceed to discussions of "evil" Julius and Morgan "the human soul". For the same reason (as well as for the sake of clarity) I shall relate primarily to Tallis and *images of good* in discussions of theoretical and methodological issues regarding interpretation of literary character with respect to moral authority. What I say in these cases, will, of course, also be relevant to my interpretations of Julius and Morgan.

There are two main tasks in the chapters ahead. Firstly, to examine the dialectic of the *ideas* of 'good', 'evil' and 'the human soul' which Tallis, Julius and Morgan as textually constructed characters represent on the one hand, and on the other, to discuss such ideas (or conceptions) as they are *embodied* in the story. These two interpretative perspectives, namely studying character as idea and embodied, as *type* and *individual*, will be interwoven in the discussion as they, although distinct, cannot be seen as isolated from one another. Secondly, the task is to ask how the analysis of Tallis and the others can bring new perspectives into the discussion of the problem of moral authority. The aim is to clarify how literary character can illuminate and develop the idea that radical relationality is a condition for understanding moral concepts as substantially authoritative with respect to reflexivity, acting and living.

b) *Type* versus *Individual*

The analysis of Tallis as *type* has as its starting point the following questions: is good as *idea* recognizable in Tallis? What images, or conceptualizations, of good does Tallis represent? To what extent is the voice of Murdoch the philosopher present in the literary configuration of good? Do *type* and idea correspond to each other? Does Tallis's story depend upon, develop and/or challenge these ideas? Some further underlying questions have to do with issues of authority: is Tallis as a representation of good a credible construction? Do I *believe* in him? If so, why? What, in the narrative, convinces me that Tallis is good?

³¹⁰ The phrase echoes the aptly titled collection of essays from a conference on Murdoch's work in Chicago in 1992: Antonacchio and Schweiker: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*.

A (literary) problem is therefore a question of “where” good belongs in the novel, and in continuation of this, on what grounds the concept of ‘good’ can have authority. This has implications for how one philosophically can conceptualize good: primarily as “idea of perfection” and universal “guide to morals”, or, alternatively, can we come to terms with good only as it can be seen and experienced – in the particularity of lived life? Or is this either/or construction false? Is not the relation between good in context and good as ideal more intricate than this?

To anticipate the conclusion, the character Tallis does provide an interesting and partially authoritative representation of good *as* “the idea of perfection” in a Murdochian-Platonic sense. Therefore, the analysis of Tallis has given (and will give further) poignant points of entry to a discussion of certain philosophical aspects of good. However, throughout the close reading, I have also attempted to show that simplistic efforts to define Tallis as good *as such*, or as for instance being a transfiguration of Christ, will not be an interpretation which takes the text seriously. The images are too ambiguous for this to be viable. Therefore, I also need to turn to a different mode of interpretation. Through this “other vision” I can illuminate how Tallis as *individual* turns out to be more than, and different to, a personification of an abstract idea. The double perspective helps me to interpret Tallis not only as a representation of abstract goodness, but also as a portrait of *the good man* who does (or tries to do) good in the “real world” (albeit fictional), a world in which he is fundamentally embedded in complex relationships filled with tension.

As I have shown earlier, Murdoch identifies some of the duality reflected above in the distinction she makes between metaphysics and reality (as well as the intricate connection between them). Antonacchio’s clarification of the Murdochian difference between good as distant perfection (sun) and good as that which makes it possible to recognize what is good in real life (light), is relevant and parallel to the distinction between Tallis as both *type* and *individual*.³¹¹ Insofar as this good character is seen from a double perspective, he represents both the “sun” and its “light”. It is, however, crucial to be aware that although a study of Murdoch’s novels can gain momentum from bringing her philosophical thought in to the discussion, I have been interested in studying how such themes are developed in a different manner in literary text, which therefore might serve to challenge and supplement the philosophical discussion.

³¹¹ Cf Part IV, Chapter 11.

The voice represented by Murdoch's philosophy is not the only voice in dialogue with the novel. I have prepared for the use of *type* and *individual* through studies of both Ricoeur and Bakhtin as well as of Murdoch. From their contributions I have gained perspectives on character that can comment on Murdoch's literary work. The juxtaposition of the different ideas of goodness that Tallis as first *type*, then *individual* represents, enables me to understand the concept of good as both *external* to the text (one kind of authority) and as *internal* to the context of the relationships in and around the text (providing a different kind of authority). It has been particularly to see how development of selfhood and character happens when voices external to the internal dialogue *enter* the discussion as incommensurable 'other', whereby each of the interlocuting voices can potentially be relativized and destabilized. In other words, using Bakhtinian terminology, I am able to identify aspects of Tallis as *type* as being monologic intrusions in the novel. *Type*, as a singular interpretative perspective on a literary character, does not usually function well in literature, and does not easily provide particularly authoritative images of good. Tallis as *individual*, however, is a dialogic construction. As *individual*, *type* and narrative stand in a dialectic relation. Although he is never a perfect character, Tallis's story can help a reader to identify the *direction* of an unfinalizable hermeneutic process. The dialogic character can open up to a more profound understanding of what it means to be good.

The dialectic of *type* versus *individual* also opens up to a reflection on the relative freedom of literary characters, which was a discussion I touched upon in the earlier chapter on Murdoch and character (Chapter 13.3). Tallis as *type* is not free. He is bound by Murdoch's conception of goodness, and does therefore not "live up to" the Murdochian ideal of freedom for characters. As *individual*, however, Tallis is to a further extent free in the sense of freedom we saw earlier (but which is, in fact, a Murdochian conception on freedom, so the issue cannot be quite resolved!). His freedom consists of a consciousness that is more transparent than that of any of the other characters. He is not consoled by fantasy, but deeply troubled by the "messy jumble" of human life reality. He is unself, free from the consoling veil of the ego. He is therefore able to see past himself to the needs of the others. In contrast, Morgan is also troubled by her life. But her suffering is very different from Tallis's. His suffering is, as we shall see, "for nothing". Hers is part of an ego-building structure, for instance as became clear in the analysis of her playing masochistic "slave" to Julius's "master". This also serves as a further argument to interpret Tallis as *type* as a monologic (here: externally Murdochian) voice in the text, whereas Tallis as *individual* represents a more dialogic structure. His selfhood

exists primarily in exercising the freedom of true vision, in his egoless relations to and particular interaction with the others. Therefore, as *individual*, he is not only represents freedom in a philosophical sense, but he is also free as a literary character.

It is also necessary to point out that although Tallis as *type* is presented above as somewhat inferior (literary speaking) to Tallis as *individual*, this does not mean that monologic *type* is irrelevant to a discussion of what literature can contribute to ethical theory. It an argument in this thesis that there *are*, in fact, different kinds of moral authority, both external and internal, and that these both have their importance and value. The crucial point is to identify the difference, and to find models for understanding how external authoritative perspectives can *enter into* the internal dialogue. When the external voice enters, it becomes part of the dialogue. The possibility of critical reflective distance is established in the juxtaposition of perspective, of 'self' and 'other'. Tallis as *type* is therefore not irrelevant to understanding the more complex Tallis as *individual*.

A crucial aspect of the conclusion of this thesis is that it is precisely in the oscillation, dialogue or hermeneutic tension between the external and the internal, or here: *type* and *individual*, that I can identify and understand problems and possibilities concerning moral authority in ethics. Thus, it is in the dialogue, or movement between the different aspects of Tallis (or good), and later Julius (or evil), that a literary text can serve as the aforementioned laboratory for understanding complex issues concerning moral language. Studies of literary text therefore can also provide new insight in, and understanding of action, relationships and human life reality in general.

c) Is Good Dull? Some Hidden Questions and a Methodological Point

A question of whether it is possible to create a credible and interesting literary figure that also is good, is discussed explicitly in a passage in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Julius is the one to point out the impossibility of the good man, but for other reasons than what Murdoch might use to argue her case for the importance of the idea of perfection. I quote a passage from a conversation between Julius and Rupert in which they discuss the idea of goodness:

'Spirit may be ambiguous,' said Rupert, 'but goodness isn't. And if we –'

'As for evil being dreary, that's an old story too. Have you ever noticed how naturally small children accept the doctrine of the Trinity, which is after all one of the most peculiar of all human conceptual inventions? Grown men show an equal facility for making completely absurd metaphysical assumptions which they feel instinctively to be comforting – for instance the assumption that good is bright and beautiful and evil is shabby, dreary or at least dark. *Good is dull. What novelist ever succeeded in making a*

good man interesting? It is characteristic of this planet that the path of virtue is so unutterably depressing that it can be guaranteed to break the spirit and quench the vision of anybody who consistently attempts to tread it. *Evil, on the contrary, is exciting and fascinating and alive. It is also very much more mysterious than good. Good can be seen through. Evil is opaque.*'

'I would like to say exactly the opposite – ' began Rupert.

'That is because you fancy something to be present which in fact is not present at all except as a shadowy dream. What passes for human goodness is in reality a tiny phenomenon, messy, limited, truncated, and as I say dull. Whereas evil (only I would prefer some less emotive name for it) reaches far far away into the depths of the human spirit and is connected with the deepest springs of human vitality.' (FHD:223, my italics)

This passage raises several questions concerning goodness (and evil). Rupert and Julius provide seeds to different sets of possible answers as to what is good and evil, and to what the concepts mean. At a deeper level, the questions involved are significant because they are crucial to understanding an authorial intention behind the textual construction of the character Tallis (and, as we shall see, of Julius): is good ambiguous? Is good dull? Can good be seen through? What is human goodness? What is the reality of good? In this chapter I (more or less explicitly) discuss if Tallis's story can contribute to a deeper understanding of the questions above, and if, in fact, these are appropriate questions one should ask concerning moral good.

Further, Julius's statements bring explicit reference to the problem of the status of good *in literature*, which is obviously relevant to what I am doing in this study. He (or Murdoch?) uses the novelist's challenge as an argument to prove his point in general: that good is dull, while evil is fascinating and alive. In my mind, Julius's voice correctly directs attention to the interpretative relevance of pre-formed assumptions which novelists and readers of a novel have regarding good and evil (for instance that good *is* "bright and beautiful"). Murdoch is thus aware of the author's dilemma, but does not quite resist the temptation of creating a glamorous and fascinating evil character.

Studying *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* at the level of *type* can prove Julius's point to be right: for Tallis as *type* is dull. There is little in his life that can teach us more about what it means to be good (if that is the goal of reading, which I, at least for the sake of the present argument, can assume to be the case). This applies to many other literary texts as well. An example of this can be seen in Dostoevsky's *Idiot* Prince Myshkin, in which the title of the novel points to the problem of good in literature.³¹² The Prince read as *type* proves Julius's point to be right.

³¹² Dostoevsky, Fyodor: *The Idiot*. New York 1981 (1st edition 1869. Translated from Russian by Constance Garnett).

Good can be “seen through”. It is simple and unrealistic, and as attitude it does not “work” in a complex world. (This is certainly not to say that Dostoevsky’s novel is simple or unrealistic, but that an interpretation of the Idiot *as good* can indicate that literary representations of a formal idea do not provide adequate, and therefore perhaps not authoritative, images of goodness.) A more recent (and less sophisticated, but enjoyable) literary exploration of the same theme, is in Nick Hornby’s *How to be Good*.³¹³ Here, the main character David represents a given set of ideas of what it means to be good, but fails to convince in a spectacular manner.³¹⁴

It is central to the present readings to identify as precisely as possible the seduction of literary *type* in order to clarify existing assumptions regarding good (and evil), and further: to see how such images figure as *archetypes* that give “clues” as to who is supposed to be good and who is supposed to be evil. In Tallis’s story direct and indirect references to Christ, to the good Samaritan, the suffering servant and the liberal do-gooder all provide assumptions which we automatically turn to in my identification of Tallis as good. (Likewise, as I shall discuss further soon, the gothic imagery, the cats and black candles, sudden appearances from the shadows, and a vampire-motif in Julius’s story all exemplify assumptions about evil, which are readily activated in evaluation of literary characters.) However, such images, although textually dominant, are not sufficient in order to identify the “true” character traits. The turn to a double perspective on character provides deeper access to a discussion of good and evil on the basis of a novel. Interesting clues as to understanding the authority by which we learn and speak about moral concepts like good and evil, can be found in the literary juxtaposition of expectation and experience which happens through distortion of familiar archetypes.

Inherent in the passage above is a methodological point which highlights my earlier insistence that the authorial voice is relevant to analysis, although it can never be given exclusive authority: several questions that Murdoch discusses throughout her philosophical texts, can be identified in the conversation between Rupert and Julius. Murdoch’s voice enters the discussion at hand. To “hear” it is, in fact, a condition for challenging it. Unexplicated, its presence will easily become a manipulative presence. (Recall how Julius’s plot was dependent on secrecy and silence, and that Simon’s empowerment was identified with his audible voice.) This provides a key argument for my use of Murdoch’s philosophical texts as partners of dialogue

³¹³ Hornby, Nick: *How to be Good*. London 2001.

³¹⁴ To a more in depth discussion of this theme, see my article: Stenseng, Maud Marion Laird: ”Kjedelig å være god? ‘Det gode menneske’ i litteraturen” in: *Kritisk forum for praktisk teologi*. Nr.87, Denmark March 2002 (p.39-49).

within the analysis of the novel. Further, a partial aspect of the audible voice of Murdoch the philosopher (represented, of course, by the text), it that it is an internally *questioning* voice which serves to highlight some of the central problems the characters in the novel represent. Thus, Murdoch does, in fact, create novels which stand in a dialogic relation to herself as author – which *does* provide her voice with more authority than a monologic author who has a clear and unambiguous “message”.³¹⁵ The relation between her different voices can therefore be seen as expressing an internally dialogic authorship. The substantial, dialogic authority which Murdoch represents, qualifies a study of her novels in which her voice is respected. This does not mean that a reader can expect her non-fiction to provide the “answers” to questions raised in a novel. Nor do her novels contain a hidden core of philosophical “truth” which can be “distilled” through reductive analysis of complex narratives. Her novels and philosophy represent, as she says, “different worlds” (albeit with certain connections between them) and correspondingly: different, heteroglossic languages.

14.2. Images of Good - Tallis Browne

a) A Portrait of Good

Where the text of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* provides elements towards an abstract construction of the character Julius, the reader easily imagines him as a glamorous and exciting person. A construction of Tallis’s personality based on *his* story, on the other hand, provides an image of a bland and boring person. Throughout the close reading, I have highlighted such textual evidence, which for the most of the time portrays Tallis as a pathetic and dull character. He is distant, elusive and unresponsive. Hardly any of the other characters take him seriously. It never becomes quite clear what, exactly, he spends his time doing, but it would appear that he is a quasi-Marxist academic historian/teacher/social-worker. He has a range of small (but ineffectual) jobs in which he tries to do some good for those he sees as less fortunate than himself. His actions do not often seem to bring about change in his surroundings, thus providing an impression of ineffectuality. (This is in contrast to Julius, who is the *primus motor* of action in the novel.) Tallis is described as being pale, thin, and with orange stringy hair and a bulky skull. His looks are at one point referred to by Julius as “gnome-like”, which serves to highlight his patheticness in relation to the regal Julius.

³¹⁵ To the extent that I would find it possible to speak about “good” and “bad” authors, this would have to be a criterion. In continuation of this, I can say that although I do not particularly *like* Murdoch’s novels, I can value them as “good art”.

Nevertheless, there is more to Tallis than this strangeness and dullness. He is a complex character, and the other characters sense this. They cannot quite understand or grasp him. His goodness does not come across in easily accessible terms. It is usually undirected and unembodied, which should be familiar from the close reading. However, towards the end of the novel Tallis actively intervenes in the action of the story. This action plays a fundamental role in the unravelling of Julius's evil proceedings. Thus, Tallis's action does bring some degree of goodness into the lives of the others. He (partially) manages to reconcile the characters with each other in the aftermath of the destruction caused by the infiltration of evil in their vulnerable lives and relationships. Tallis's movement from being a passive sufferer to taking a role of active engagement is the narrative "place" where the juxtaposition of *type* and *individual* can be identified.

In studying Tallis *as text*, the abstract construction of his character in the readers mind takes place. By doing this, the foundations for a discussion of what he represents are laid. I shall study how the character Tallis, as a "set of recognizable traits", is established in the text. This leads to a discussion of possible interpretations of and consequences of the construction of Tallis with respect to issues of identity and relationality. I shall also study how the concept of 'plot' can lead to a deeper understanding of Tallis, and proceeding from this: the moral authority of 'good'.

Tallis is mentioned early in the first chapter, but only after Julius is introduced (FHD:13). His lesser role in the story is therefore indicated already at this stage. Julius plays first fiddle in the minds of the others from the beginning. Tallis is introduced matter-of-factly in the middle of a conversation, when Rupert and Hilda are discussing whether or not he knows that both Julius and Morgan are in London. The first impression a reader has, is that of a tragic figure, a sad cuckold: an image that perseveres throughout most of the narrative. In several of the conversations in the story's exposition (i.e. the first three chapters), we are presented with some of the most central of Tallis's recognizable character traits. A range of descriptive words are used, and most of them point in one direction. He is seen by the Fosters as serious, pathetic, a drop-out, irritating, forgiving, lacking in dignity and boring. He is spiritless, kind, a muddler, feeble, and wet. At one point Rupert asks Hilda: "But do you mean Tallis should see Julius to make an outraged husband scene? That hardly seems in character!" (FHD:15). It is inconceivable that Tallis could be vengeful, angry or jealous. The impression is of a man who is more or less disconnected to reality. He comes across as being intangible, "outside" of reality, and difficult to relate to. None of the characters, however, ever seem to doubt that he is good. His

abstractness corresponds closely to a disembodied conception of goodness, and is central to the construction of Tallis as *type*.

The good man Tallis is also perceived as being idealistic, but weak: “Poor old Tallis often thinks he can help people but really he’s hopelessly incompetent” (FHD:20), says Hilda. Later, she points out that Tallis is “a perfectly self-respecting intellectual, or he could be if he’d only pull up his socks (...) a reasonable amount of efficiency is an aspect of morals. There’s a sort of ordered completeness of life and an intelligent use of one’s talents which is the mark of a man.” (FHD:22) Here, different expectations of what it means to be “good”, or moral, come to the foreground. Hilda’s argument represents a form of utilitarian consequentialist ethic, in which self-realization and productivity lies at the heart of a moral society, and which it is the individual’s duty to develop. In contrast, Tallis represents an ideal of “purposeless” goodness that is not of this world, and therefore unrecognizable to Hilda. She believes he has it in him, but that he is not being a responsible, rational (intelligent) agent. The ideal he represents is utterly foreign to *her* expectation of what morality is (which, to some extent, is representative of a British upper middle class society in the 1960’s).

At this point I shall let Murdoch’s voice enter the study of “textual Tallis”, in order to see how the description of his traits can be understood in a wider (Murdochian) perspective: Tallis’s typical goodness (at this stage) can be interpreted in light of its correspondence to the explicit ideal which Murdoch speaks of:

The Good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose. ‘All is vanity’ is the beginning and 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. (SOG:71)

The colloquial phrase ‘good for nothing’ designates uselessness or patheticness. So far in the analysis of Tallis *as text*, I have attempted to show that the given impression of Tallis in the beginning of the novel is precisely this: that he is “good for nothing”. Being good ‘for nothing’, however, involves something different for Murdoch than the meaning above: namely that of *a selfless acceptance of the contingency of human life reality*. This is an almost impossible feat for any human. The portrayal of Tallis confirms this impossibility. He is elusive and incredible. Tallis, whose character is almost impossible to understand and difficult to believe in, represents the Murdochian idea of good, in that he is good ‘for nothing’.

Julius makes the point that ‘good is dull’. Tallis as *type*, or a representation of the Murdochian ideal of good being ‘for nothing’, *is* dull – and hardly credible as a real person. In effect then,

through using Tallis as a 'test-case', Murdoch illuminates her philosophical point: that the ideal, the good, is distant, that it is 'blank' and 'non-representable'. Tallis as representation does not "function" (which Morgan at one point in the novel articulates). It is only when his goodness has purpose, when he interacts in response to the needs of others, that he emerges as a credible character: a person, something "more" than an artistic representation of an idea. Thus, in a sense, "human goodness" is a "lesser good" than the Idea of Perfection (good), but nevertheless the only possibility for humans. The point I wish to make here, is that Tallis's dull and pathetic character traits (as they are portrayed in the exposition and which continue to gain momentum until the end of the novel's Part One where he physically interacts with others) are more or less "inhuman".

Returning to further aspects of the textual development of Tallis's character traits, it is significant that already at an early stage, Tallis's characteristic messiness, untidiness and uncleanliness is mentioned. This is continued as a theme throughout his story, and is a strong indication that these are important symbols with regard to identification of his traits. He himself, his house and his father are filthy. Tallis does not seem to be uncomfortable with this, although all the others do. There are scenes in which Morgan, Hilda and Julius try to clean or tidy Tallis's house. In order to interpret this aspect of the textual Tallis, it is helpful to return to the voice of Murdoch the philosopher. "Messiness" is a word she often uses to describe human life reality. Life is pointless in itself, it is contingent and has no unified meaning. I have earlier shown that, in Murdoch's opinion, humans cope with this by seeking different forms of consolation, which serve as veils that hide true reality. (With respect to the discussion directly above, it is relevant here to point out that to be good 'for something' would in this sense be a form of consolation.) To see and respond to reality as it is, in all its messiness and pointlessness, is what Murdoch calls 'to see clearly'. Further, such clear vision is fundamental to what it means to be good. To be able to truly accept mortality and one's nothingness makes it possible to see beyond oneself, to what is other. Says Murdoch: "The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are. He sees the pointlessness of virtue and its unique value and the endless extent of its demand." (SOG:104)

Tallis is humble in this sense. He accepts the messiness of life (physically and symbolically), and does not seem to need to seek consolation. Tallis's messiness and uncleanliness can therefore be taken to be a further indication that he is constructed as a representation of a good man. This is a more complex and less accessible archetypal image than what one could expect: good characters are more likely to be imagined as clean and tidy persons (or, as Julius

said: “bright and beautiful”). At this stage of representation, a shift occurs from traditional archetypes into what one could say is “Murdochian type”. Tallis is a representation of an idea, although not straightforward and obviously so. Murdoch’s voice (through Tallis) is prominent, and it therefore makes sense (at this stage) to identify these aspects of Tallis as being externally imposed onto the story.

Thus, throughout the first chapters, a detailed portrait of Tallis and his traits is presented. He is portrayed as good, but it is an elusive goodness. The image of the pathetic, muddled character is at this stage more or less given, and it will take much to change this impression. Nevertheless, he is not altogether a failure as a credible literary character, because the reader’s curiosity is established: who is Tallis? What is he *really* like? The illusion that there is more to him is present in the text. Already at this stage there are indications that people perceive him differently, and that his traits are ambiguous. There are for instance several occasions where Rupert and Hilda not only disagree as to their interpretations of Tallis, but represent opposing opinions. This brings a sense of ambivalence into the reader’s expectation of Tallis. For instance, Rupert at one point sees him as being thoughtless, whereas Hilda replies “or thoughtful” (FHD:14). Rupert once says that Tallis is “one of the sanest men I know”, when Hilda sees him as “crazed up for life” (FHD:21). Rupert points out Tallis’s elusiveness explicitly: “But in fact, my dear Hilda, we have no means of knowing how jealous or un-jealous Tallis really is. Why should he tell us anything?” (FHD:22) His character traits are recognizable and credible, but somewhat confusing. However, these traits are not static. Tallis changes over time. (Or is the change in the mind of the reader?) The identification of the change in Tallis is not primarily descriptive. It belongs to the *plot* of the narrative, which I now shall examine.

Central to my analysis of plot in Tallis’s story is to focus on the novel’s exploration of his goodness and identity as *paradoxical*. The plot of his narrative is simultaneously of becoming and disintegration, of being and non-being, of victory and defeat. Thus, it makes sense to speak of several plots internal to Tallis’s story, which are not even internally coherent or consistent. This sense of confusion is, however, not something to be overcome, but to be respected as integral to Murdoch’s contribution to literature. As Heusel points out in response to Harold Bloom’s critique of Murdoch’s lack of consistency, this is precisely what she seeks to achieve: “She refuses to console readers by fulfilling their expectations; she undermines realistic representation and teaches readers to unlearn their perceptions.”³¹⁶ I have shown that

³¹⁶ Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.23.

contingency and lack of consistent patterns are both important ideals of Murdochian art, as well as central concepts in her moral philosophy. And for her, art is that which helps to develop new perceptions of reality. We do well to keep this in mind in a study of Tallis.

Further, the sense of paradox and inconsistency in Tallis's story provides a perspective from which I can discuss how to understand him as a representative of "good" as an authoritative moral concept. In order to enter this problem, I ask: "What is the *task* of the plot?" Ricoeur, as we saw in the discussion of his understanding of the concept of character, identifies one meaning of character to be the convergence of *idem* and *ipse*, or sameness and selfhood. Character as consistency of traits by which we recognize someone, is the "place" where the two perspectives are indistinguishable. However, if one also brings temporality into the equation, a narrative and its plot serve to "integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability" (OA:140). This we can see in Tallis's story. The "sameness" of identifiable traits becomes destabilised during the novel's timeline. Ricoeur continues, "the notion of emplotment (...) produces a dialectic of the character which is quite clearly a dialectic of sameness and selfhood" (OA:140).

For Ricoeur, *sameness* is the aspect of character that is about recognition of traits in time, while *selfhood* is the aspect of character by which one can speak of a 'self' in relation to 'other'. Narrative emplotment is the bond between a character's movement through time on the one hand, and on the other, its situatedness in relationships which brings perspectivism and diversity into the construction of character. Narrative identity is a response to both aspects of character: it is a language, a form of cognition, for a space in which both continuity and radical change are (paradoxically) included, and is what makes it possible for the self to reflect on the "I" who acts.

Therefore, by expanding the concept of character as "traits" through including the concept of emplotment, we are able to speak about a moral self who can transcend and break free from (monologic) *sameness*. And because of the internal dialectic (dialogue) within the self, a reflective dimension is integrated in the moral subject.³¹⁷ The task of the plot is, therefore, to destabilize the "givenness", or *sameness*, of the description of a character. Tallis as good, as

³¹⁷ The integration here between Ricoeurian and Bakhtinian terminology is done with an awareness that their patterns of thought are different, and that a simple conflation of their philosophies may lead astray. However, I have shown that there are strong similarities between the structures I here am relating to, and therefore wish to show how they correspond positively to each other at times.

an emplotted construction, is therefore profoundly relational. His paradoxical nature, and the ambiguities of plot which constitute his selfhood (that he, for instance, acts “out of character”), are in this sense not disqualifying to his credibility. They are precisely what provides the story of Tallis with internal, dialogic authority.³¹⁸

The distinction between plot and story in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is fuzzy. The story is narrated chronologically, and the plot(s) therefore develop(s) as the story unfolds. From the beginning of the story, Tallis is a rather ineffectual person who tries to be and do good, but his vague actions lead to irritation and frustration. As the narrative proceeds, however, several incidents occur in which Tallis acts concretely and physically. It is in this narrative development that the plot of his story is constituted. His actions bring difference and instability to his recognisable character traits. I shall study several aspects of what implications this can have.

It can be argued that Tallis’s story ends in defeat. Goodness loses because his active and real participation in the lives of others occurs too late. The destructive evil forces, which Julius represents, have been allowed to proceed too far into the close-knit community in order for them to be redeemed by Tallis’s attempts to undo what has gone wrong. Therefore: his story is one of failure. This does, however, not necessarily mean that the plot fails. His plot is one of a development from ‘idea’ to ‘reality’, from being a representation of abstract goodness towards actual involvement in relationships. His goodness gradually becomes tangible and credible, although it is more ambiguous in action than as idea. The empty idea becomes reality, *type* becomes *individual*.

Such a plot is similar to the movement *from appearance to reality*, which I have discussed several times earlier. In Murdochian language, the good person, the unself, is he or she who sees reality as it really is, unencumbered by consoling fantasy. The identification of the plot as being one of a movement from appearance to reality is, however, not uncomplicated. For what is real, and what is apparent? Tallis’s plot does not primarily concern human moral development (as Morgan’s partially does), but the meaning of moral concepts. Thus, there is an aspect in which Tallis never escapes being *type*, or in other words: a representation of the idea of good. The image changes, but not his role. Tallis is, therefore, not really (or only) ‘the pilgrim of the cave’, he is ‘the sun’. On the other hand, however, there *are* aspects of pilgrimage

³¹⁸ The inclusion of paradox in character provides the moral subject with possibilities to be both *Same and Different* within oneself. This idea of character therefore challenges the Hauerwasian “monolithic” character’s dependence on the ‘other’ for a reflective position. Moral authority in the sense that I am developing it, is dependent on the responsibility inherent in a reflective position *within* narrative, a narrative which inescapably becomes in relation to (not in opposition to) what is ‘other’.

in his story. His plot *does* concern issues of selfhood and personal identity. It is to this ambiguity in Tallis's plot I now turn, in a discussion of these complex aspects of his (Platonic) plot.

In an examination of how the other characters see Tallis and relate to him in the beginning of the novel, there is not much textual evidence that he is respected for what he is attempting to do or be. As I have shown, he *appears* to be good, but this goodness is elusive. The others are not sure what to make of him. Rupert and Hilda worry that Peter staying with Tallis is doing him more harm than good: "I do wish now we hadn't agreed to his going to stay with Tallis. Tallis is a sort of drop-out himself." (FHD:20) His father Leonard is disappointed in him, and disapproves of his work: "He still imagines that his petty agitations and solemnities make some kind of difference to this stinking dung heap." (FHD:64) Morgan cannot understand him, and is haunted by his memory. For her, Tallis is a mystery without substance: "Tallis has got no inner life, no real conception of himself, there's a sort of emptiness. (...) Sometimes he seemed to me almost like an apparition." (FHD:60-61) In Morgan's eyes, Tallis has no "being". Simon and Axel are the only ones who respect and like Tallis. They see him, and care for him, but their conception of him is as a solitary person who would prefer to be left alone when facing what the couple suspects is a bad time ahead for Tallis: "Tallis is probably better off on his own. (...) He's a natural solitary" (FHD:33). They therefore choose not involve themselves with Tallis.

None of the other characters see Tallis truly as *part of* relationships. In their eyes, he has opted out of society. With this, I return to the discussion of 'nothingness' as part of a Murdochian configuration of good. There is a lack of true presence, being or depth to Tallis: "There's something awfully flat about Tallis", says Hilda at one point (FHD:61). Morgan says about him in comparison to Julius: "Tallis has no myth. Julius is almost all myth" (FHD:60). Tallis's nothingness can also be identified explicitly in the text as a form of invisibility. Such invisibility corresponds to what Julius says: "Good can be seen through. Evil is opaque" (FHD:223). How, then, is the complex relationship between nothingness and goodness is developed as literary plot? What does the emplotted notion of Tallis's nothingness have to do with his goodness?

A first aspect of this discussion, is that the nothingness sensed by the others corresponds to the first time we as readers enter Tallis's mind, a scene which I discussed in the close read-

ing.³¹⁹ The passage is written as a stream-of-consciousness. (A parallel scene also occurs at the end of the novel.) In the discussion about Ricoeur and character in Chapter 13.3, I treated his view that in such a non-narrative style, there exists a possibility of “escaping the plot” by rendering a character’s “loss of identity”. In this scene, Tallis introspectively sees himself as nothing. At one level, then, Tallis’s story (seen from his own point of view) is one in which he has no being. In this, he has lost, or escaped, his plot. This serves as ‘other’ to the point that the plot of Tallis’s story is one of becoming a real person. According to himself (albeit unconsciously), he never does emerge as “real”. Following Ricoeur, there exists an opposite plot (or “non-plot”) in relation to the plot of “becoming”, which was identified above. What appears to be real is revealed as nothing. Such ambiguity concerning Tallis’s plot is crucial to understanding him, and in continuation of this, the concept of good.

The presence of this dialectic between appearance and reality, or being and nothingness, can be identified explicitly in the text in several places. In the close reading, I discussed the connection between non-relationality and non-identity in Tallis’s interaction with Peter. The point then, was to show how Tallis’s awareness that in relation to himself, Peter is not forced to “play a role”. He is therefore free to “be himself”. Tallis realises that Peter’s freedom is because of his own “invisibility”. This concerns an interesting problem concerning the role of selfhood and sense of personal identity with reference to relationality. On the basis of the passage in question, it is necessary to ask if it is true that Tallis’s nothingness is what helps Peter. In the text it appears to be so (at least from Tallis’s point of view). If this is the case, it would mean that one can only truly *be oneself* in isolation from others (Peter is only free to be himself if Tallis is nothing). This, however, runs counter to the relational anthropology which otherwise can be identified in the novel. The problem raises several issues with respect to the Murdochian ideal of ‘unselfing’, which is a complicated, and not altogether unproblematic concept.

From the perspective of ‘unself’, then, Tallis’s “nothingness” in the passage at hand does not necessarily imply that he is not part of the relation (which, of course, he physically is). It can be a metaphor for his total selflessness: the capacity for seeing what is ‘other’ (in this case Peter) as real and different to oneself. In this ‘unselfing’, the other will, because of being seen, also be enabled to see him or herself. Therefore, in Tallis’s identification of his invisibility/nothingness in relation to Peter, a possible first step is taken towards his finding true self-

³¹⁹ Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.1.c.

hood, which, in fact, is ‘*unself*’. A sense of ‘being’, or ‘self’ is necessary to be a part of a relationship, and the only place where goodness makes sense, is in relation to ‘other’. In this sense, Tallis’s story does have a pilgrimage-plot. However, it is necessary to ask what the “self” is that she speaks about? What *is* the ‘unself’?³²⁰ Does it mean having ‘no self’? What is the relation to “selflessness”? I touched upon this problem in the close reading of the non-relationship between Tallis and Peter, in which I concluded that the two attitudes to relationships represent a double fallacy concerning what it takes to become good: Tallis’s problem is that he has no self and is elusive and unrecognisable as good, while Peter’s is that he is too full of himself to see beyond the ego. However, it is precisely Tallis’s selflessness that casts him as the good person in the novel. Can this be resolved?

I suggest that it cannot quite be resolved. There is an internally incommensurable aspect to Tallis’s story. From one perspective it makes sense to interpret the plot of his story as that of his escaping it. In this he continues to be *type*. The lack of emplottedness (embodiedness) implies that he continues to be an elusive personification of the empty idea of good throughout the novel. However, this corresponds in an ironic way to the other plot, namely to the bildungs-motif in the plot of “becoming”. For it is precisely in the *acceptance* of his nothingness, of actually going through it, that he is enabled to reach out and become part of relationships – thus becoming a good man, a good *individual*. It is as nothing (‘unself’) he truly sees the other, and thereby represents the goodness of a real person. On this basis, the study of the complexity of plot in Tallis’s story gives access to seeing a double direction of progression. In a sense, this duality of plot parallels the plot in the Platonic myth of the cave, in the double movement of ascent and descent.

I have now identified seemingly incommensurable, yet intricately related plots: one of becoming (the movement from appearance to reality) and one of non-being, or the development of the ‘unself’. The latter is, in fact, double: it involves both a plot and a negation of plot. In addition, there is a further duality within what I have identified as the plot of becoming. In the close reading, I suggested that a shift with respect to the plot of Tallis’s becoming an *individual*, a person in relation to others, occurs in the last chapter of Part One, in the scene in the Chinese restaurant. This is the first time Tallis appears to be strong, and is an active agent for change. He responds physically to the suffering of the Jamaican (and of Simon?) by fighting the harassing young men. I also noted the restaurant was situated in a cellar. With respect to

³²⁰ There is an interesting linguistic (and substantial) link here to Ricoeur’s notion that “in reading, I ‘unrealise’ myself”. See a discussion of this in Part I, Chapter 5.2.

the parable of the cave, a motif of descent is therefore present. Tallis enters the underground. This is significant in Tallis's narrative, because it represents the turning point in the development from his being an abstract, disembodied figure towards physicality, particularity, presence and embodiment. From this point of view, the plot of Tallis's story represents a victory.

In the close reading I suggested that this scene might be of particular relevance to an interpretation based on intertextual reference: namely to see Tallis as a transfiguration of Christ. In the close reading there were several instances that can lend themselves to such an interpretation (for instance that Tallis was born around Christmas). This is the stage in the story where 'goodness becoming' can be interpreted in terms of an incarnatory motif. G(o)od becomes flesh. Transcendence (Tallis as idea) becomes incarnated (Tallis as active agent). A Christian understanding of the incarnation is that in Christ, God communicates godself to humanity. Although Murdoch insists that God and good are not the same, the incarnation as a model, as interpretative tool, can be helpful in order to see how 'good' as an abstract idea is meaningless if not embodied, or incarnated, in human life relational reality. When Tallis encounters evil by physically fighting it, the contours of a real good man become visible. The idea of Tallis as a good man becomes *communicable*.

Northrop Frye, in his book *The Great Code*, identifies the story of Christ as a classical U-shaped comedy. Such comedy is a narrative "where a series of misfortunes and misunderstandings bring the action to a threateningly low point, after which some fortunate twist in the plot sends the conclusion up to a happy ending".³²¹ Tallis transfigures this plot to a certain extent, as we have seen. The restaurant-scene can be seen as the "fortunate twist in the plot" which leads to Tallis's ascent from the low point of his unhappy life towards a "happy ending". There is a real change in Tallis from here. The scene is also a prefiguration of his actions with regard to intervening in Julius's games with the other's lives. He interacts more intimately with other characters, and relates to the pain he can see that Julius is causing. Thus, his action is relationally situated and embodied (as symbolized in the fight). His actions are not results of appropriating a fixed idea of "what would be the good thing to do" onto a given situation. Tallis proves himself to have become good (or better). With reference to Frye, then, it makes sense that after Tallis's metaphoric death (the profound experience of nothingness studied above), the fight in the cellar marks the beginning of an ascent from his low point in

³²¹ Frye, Northrop: *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature*. San Diego/New York/London 1982, p.169.

an upwards movement towards *becoming* a good man. This change never reaches its full potential, however, because Tallis is ultimately defeated by evil.

Therefore, and just as (or more) significant than Tallis's plot transfiguring that of Christ, is that he also escapes it. Tallis's story does not have a happy ending. The discrepancies between the plot of Tallis's story and that of Christ proves the otherwise often Christ-like Tallis to be a perversion, or a foreshortening, of the Biblical divine comedy. There is a fundamental difference between Christ and Tallis, in that the ending of the story of Christ is eschatological, whereas Tallis is (although there are hints in the text to his otherworldliness) a human. This point can be further illuminated by turning to a literary model which is a parallel to the U-shaped comedy, namely the formula for the "bildungs-roman".³²² This model can help to identify a certain kind of development in a story's character: namely how the protagonist voy-ages through a pattern of home-wilderness-home. This is an apt model by which to understand Tallis, because studying his story, it what we gain access to within the text is representative only of a wilderness-experience. There are references to a first "home"-situation, namely that of Tallis and Morgan's marriage, but this is outside the story text itself. Further, Tallis never reaches out of the wilderness. His nothingness does not become resolved in a new home-coming. His plot is, from this point of view, one of defeat.

Concerning plot, a final comment must be made on the relation between Tallis's plot and the plot of the novel. It makes sense that the title of the novel refers to the plot of becoming. The "honourability" is with respect to the success of Tallis's gradual embodiment of goodness. The "defeat" refers to his tragedy of not being able to conquer evil. However, the question remains open as to whether or not the title refers to Tallis's plot. The novel cannot be reduced to the story of Tallis and the plots of his becoming and non-being. In the next chapter, I shall suggest a possible alternative interpretation of who is honourably defeated and who it is that wins. Further, Tallis's plot could not develop in isolation from the plots of the other characters. This interaction between characters at the level of plot is therefore an aspect of the novel's dialogism.

b) Character, Moral Authority and Good

I have now studied two aspects of the character Tallis, and during this, discussed several of its implications. I first identified and discussed Tallis as a "set of recognizable traits" based on textual evidence. From this it was possible to establish an image of a personlike being, and to

³²² Aarseth, Asbjørn: *Episke strukturer. Innføring i anvendt fortellerteori*, Oslo 1991, s.170-176.

discuss the credibility of this construction. I concluded that he only to a certain extent was credible on the basis of a description of his traits. The traits could only make real sense when they were emplotted in the narrative, through a movement in time in interaction with the other characters. Therefore, the second aspect I studied, was the plot of Tallis's story. This proved to be a paradoxical and ambivalent matter. In his story there is a complex oscillation between *being and nothingness*.

One aspect of his "being" can be restated in Bakhtinian terms: when Tallis's character zone comes into contact with the other characters zones, i.e. enters into dialogue based on relationships in which Tallis is a 'self' with a voice, he gradually becomes a credible person, a character with authority – both with respect to the other characters, and with respect to the reader. Such *individual* "being" is an embodiment of the idea of goodness, and stands in opposition to the "nothingness" of Tallis, which, in this case, is monologically imposed in the text. As *type*, therefore, he has less credibility and authority. This is central to my conclusion of what can be drawn from an interpretation of Tallis. However, this does not exhaust my interpretation. There is more to say.

I have also identified a further aspect of Tallis's movement from representing an abstract idea to gradually "becoming" real goodness. This occurs in his *acceptance* of "nothingness". Only as 'unself' is he the good man. Such 'unself' is, however, an ambiguous term. It cannot mean that there is no self, for if there were no 'self' there would be no real relation to the 'other'. 'Unself', therefore, does not correspond to an anthropology or ethic in which disintegration or submission of the self is an ideal. Rather, it means that what is 'not', is the ego, the self who is identified in *opposition* to what is other, but not inherently part of the relation. This involves a split between the 'self' and the 'ego', in which the 'ego' represents what Murdoch calls "the fantasy self". It is this self that must be "unselfed" for the "true self" to become. The fantasy self believes herself to be alone and rational, and thrives upon the validation of *seeing herself*. The 'ego' sees the other as a mirror, and in its reflection it defines itself. The 'ego' does not, therefore, actually see the other. The image of such a self is ultimately, therefore, a distortion – and the 'true self' dissolves. The ideal of the 'unself', on the other hand, corresponds to the radical relational anthropology I have argued in favour of. It is only by seeing oneself as, or in the other, that one can truly become oneself. The Murdochian concept of 'unself' is a useful term by which to articulate an ideal, but in practice unattainable selfhood in which the true self is profoundly identified only in a relational dialectic movement: 'ubuntu' - "I am because you are". Or: "I *am not* without the other".

I will suggest the possibility that what we see in much of Tallis's character, story and plot, is Murdoch's "proof" that the "real" good man does not exist, or is at the least hard to picture:

What is a good man like? (...) We realise on reflection that we know little about good men. There are men in history who are traditionally thought of as having been good (Christ, Socrates, certain saints), but if we try to contemplate these men we find that the information about them is scanty and vague, and that, their great moments apart, it is the simplicity and directness of their diction which chiefly colours our conception of them as good. And if we consider contemporary candidates for goodness, if we know of any, we are likely to find them obscure, or else on closer inspection full of frailty. Goodness appears to be both rare and hard to picture. (SOG:52)

In this, she echoes (or is echoed by) Julius's comment on the impossibility of the good man in literature. It is, according to Murdoch, not possible to be perfect *and* to be a real person. Human life reality always represents degrees of appearance. This is why Tallis as *type* makes no sense to the others. He is obscure and "full of frailty". For Murdoch 'good' is transcendent, an ideal limit. Any human embodiment is only but a partial good in which the direction of good can be seen, but it is not good itself. Thus, Tallis as *type*, as a representation of the idea of good, is unbelievable, pathetic and ineffectual. Tallis as *individual* is not perfect, but nevertheless (or precisely therefore) represents the good man, as far as it is possible for a human to be good. This is the reality of being human: we cannot become good. We can, however, do our best towards becoming good.

In Tallis's ambiguous plot of identity, or radically hermeneutic story of selfhood, it is also possible to identify a key theme concerning the reflective self. Heusel discusses it with reference to the Wittgensteinian influence on Murdoch. Here point is how Murdoch wishes to escape the (modern) solipsism of a certain understanding of language through which the individual is bound, not free. The (reflexive) freedom she seeks for the individual is not primarily to be understood as (Kantian) autonomy, but a freedom to *see oneself from different perspectives*, which, according to Heusel, Wittgenstein's conceptualization of language-games is also helpful towards understanding.³²³ Says Heusel:

Postmodernist describes Murdoch at least insofar as her desire to escape the bounds of one way of looking matches the postmodern impulse to get outside the mind to see the mind thinking. Murdoch's texts insist that in order to look outside oneself to see the self looking, one must first see the self in the other.³²⁴

³²³ I have discussed earlier the necessity of perspectivism within selfhood, for instance by way of Ricoeurian perspectives on narrative selfhood and plot, and in connection with the critique of narrativists such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre.

³²⁴ Heusel: *Patterned Aimlessness*, p.89.

The images Murdoch present in her construction of the character Tallis – his quest for finding his identity and being, and his experiences of nothingness and invisibility – have illuminated the need for a reflexive position within character, in the identification of “oneself as another”. Antonacchio says about what she calls Murdoch’s reflexive, or hermeneutic realism, that the moral agent can gain “valid moral knowledge in and through the reflexive medium of consciousness itself.”³²⁵ Such a position differs from what I have argued is the double fallacy of, on the one hand, seeking the reflective point of view from a self outside of narrative imagining the possibility of a decontextualised, individualistic and rational point of view, and on the other, a self who is defined by narrative but who determines his or her character by stepping out into a grander, or at least different, narrative in order to establish a vantage point from which to “see” the self.

Thus, it is within the story of Tallis’s battle of understanding who he is, his plot and non-plot of being and nothingness in relation to others, that his true self is revealed. Tallis, the good individual, is from such a point of view credible precisely in his ambiguity.

14.3. Images of Evil - Julius King

a) A Portrait of Evil

As a reader, I construct characters based on the textual evidence I have available. Their person-likenesses, however, come to life in my imagination. The imagination is conditioned by the text, but it is nevertheless free in the sense that all readers will, to some extent, imagine their own, different characters. Attending to characters in a novel, therefore, is an interactive process which can be identified using dialogue as metaphor. The literary character cannot transcend the status it has as an interpreted configuration of language and narrative. Therefore, it is crucial that I am aware that the character whom I may feel that I know, is not a person. Nor is it given once and for all, but it is a result of my own dialogue with the voices that are represented in a given text. Reading about a character one already at the outset of reading expects to be “evil”, or “good” or “an image of the human soul” (because, perhaps, one has read *about* the book) will also condition the interpretation. It is easy to look for what confirms such an expectation, and forgetting to ask: “what do I really expect evil, or good, or the human soul to be”? Am I open to changing my mind about what I thought I knew? Further, it is also easy for the reader to relate to what she can identify with, and maybe discard what seems

³²⁵ Antonacchio: *Picturing the Human*, p.116.

to be distant, unlikeable or inaccessible. It is, therefore, necessary for a reader to be critical and self-aware in the imagining of an “evil” character (who one likes to think is “other” to oneself).

It is also important to be aware of interpretative “traps”, for instance as when a narrator provides privileged access to the “mind” of a character through deep focalization of his or her perspective (such as in the story of Tallis, or Simon). In the case of Julius and his story, however, a reader is not in the same way manipulated into believing that he or she knows who Julius “really is” because, as I have mentioned earlier, the narrator does not (and therefore the reader cannot) enter the mind of Julius until the very last sentences of the novel. This means that the character Julius will, to some extent, be constructed on the basis of *external* aspects of the textual portrayal: descriptions of him by the narrator and the other characters, by his action, and, not least in the case of Julius, from an extensive use of symbolic and intertextual references. The access to Julius as *type* is, therefore much simpler than to his *individuality*. This leads to a different kind of suspicion one must have to the text: what *appears* to be the substantial content of Julius’s story is difficult to distinguish from the form of his story. There is therefore a conflation between *type* and *individual* which easily activates the reader’s stereotypes of evil as a key to an interpretation instead of challenging the reader. From the close reading, I have evidence that Julius’s traits are more consistent with his action than what I have shown there to be in Tallis’s story. This illusion can be just as powerful as the illusion that one has entered the mind of Tallis, or Simon. It is, therefore, the task of this chapter to search for indications of difference between *type* and *individual* in the character Julius.

I shall concentrate this analysis on some instances which expose the individuality of Julius, thereby bringing a note of ambiguity into the forceful image of evil that the novel at a first glance provides. Subtle indications of his powerlessness and loss of ego are given in several different forms, and disrupt the primacy of Julius read as *type*: in and through symbols, actions, and with respect to the plot of his story. As a background to this analysis, it is crucial to remember an aspect of Murdoch the philosopher’s view of ‘evil’: namely as that which is not nothing, but is inversion or perversion of what is good and true. This motif is central to an interpretation of Julius, and will be discussed in this analysis. The ultimate aim is, as it was in the study of Tallis, to show that as my voice as a reader enters into dialogue with the author and characters, my understanding of what evil “is” becomes more transparent. Such an interaction with a literary text can at its best, therefore, serve to challenge and develop the substantial content of my moral language and agency, or: what I hold to be morally authoritative.

The fact that we do not get access to the “inner realm” of Julius, or that the difference between *type* and *individual* is hardly identifiable, however, do not in themselves discredit him as an interesting character. Quite the opposite, in fact. As I have pointed out earlier, that a reader believes that she knows a character is be an illusion which might, for one, depend on the narrator’s credibility. There is no direct reason not to trust the narrator of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, but as the close reading shows, the narrator is also susceptible to illusion. In Part Two the narrator appears to be almost as much of a victim of Julius’s lies as the characters are. This perspective on the narration could provide a reason for the powerful image of Julius which is portrayed throughout most of the novel: he is, so to speak, “above”, and manipulative of, the narrator – an expression of the ultimate ego. It is *he* who creates the illusion, the characterization of himself, the fantasy, and the plot of the novel. He is the grand puppet-master and the superhuman magician. Most of the descriptions of Julius’s character traits make sense if they are interpreted the light of this: for Julius as *type* is powerful, glamorous, enchanting, exciting and seductive. But then, what is reality? What is appearance? Such a representation of Julius also corresponds to the Murdochian view of evil: vanity, fantasy and a grandiosely inflated ego (i.e. the inversion of ‘unself’). These are the evil and destructive forces of the novel, as was developed in the close reading. They are represented primarily by Julius, but are also significant with respect to most of the characters’ stories.

Tallis and Julius both appear in the novel as being rather mysterious characters, but for unlike reasons. Morgan’s description of the men, that “Tallis has no myth. Julius is almost all myth” (FHD:60), indicates a significant difference between them: Tallis is almost impossible to understand, even though the opportunities are plenty from all the focalization by the narrator. In the last section, a main point was to see how Tallis’s plot and his escaping the plot both supported the development of the ‘unself’ as the true self. Good is elusive, and it can be “seen through”. It is hard to fathom the good man: he “has no myth”, he is ‘nothing’. Julius, on the other hand, seems much easier to understand at a first glance, primarily because he lives up to many expectations of what an evil person would be like. He is characterized as being manipulative, he inflicts suffering and enjoys watching it, he has little compassion or empathy, and so forth. His mystery has a different source, and is a reason why most of the characters are fascinated by him: it is that he has a seductive power which is unidentifiable. The mystery of evil is, in part, because it is inaccessible. No-one knows Julius, not even the narrator. However, they think they do (except for Simon).

A partial reason for the sense of mystery surrounding Julius can be explained by a turn to the plot. There is, however, not much to say about Julius's individual plot. Apart from being the one who masterminds the main plot of the novel, there is little other action or development in his own, individual story. If, as I suggested in the analysis of Tallis, the emplotment of selfhood and agency in a person's narrative belongs to the formation of identity, the lack of plot in Julius's story is significant. It indicates of his lack of "being" (in a sense that differs from Tallis's 'unbeing'). Therefore, a deficiency of identity and individuality are both central to the textual characterisation of Julius. In consequence of having no real true self, or identity, he more or less "adopts" (or rather: the reader ascribes to him) the plots of the symbols and inter-textual references by which he is represented (for instance: the Adversary, a Vampire, Leviathan). That Julius is "almost all myth" is, therefore, true. He is a seductive and stereotypic figure of fantasy, a form. He is, however, a flat character who hardly surprises in his "evilness". Gothic imagery surrounds him. He appears silently and suddenly out of shadows, like a ghost. He cannot swim (which in a Murdochian universe indicates evil). He is vain, controlling, tidy and in the final scene: exposed as being shallow. As indicated several times in the close reading, Julius and Tallis are "same" in that they are both, in a sense, superhuman. Julius speaks about humans as if he were not human himself.

There are, however, two minor (but crucial) incidents that can provide insight into a different aspect of Julius, namely his vulnerability and humanity. The most important of these occurs when Tallis sees the tattoo on his arm and Julius tells Tallis (but no one else) about the concentration camp. There is also an earlier incident in which he discovers that Morgan has aborted what would have been his child: his remorse, anger and sorrow are all evident. These occasions are both, however, given surprisingly little attention in the text. Regarding these two cases, it is almost as if the narrator does not realise that Julius is, or can be, a victim. The narrator's illusion that Julius is omnipotent receives small jolts (such as in these cases), but the real impact does not occur. In the case of Julius's narrative (and character), therefore, the power with which he is portrayed is intensified by a narrator who does not truly see who Julius is. The narration of Julius is not the narrator's, it is Julius himself who has the power to manipulate the story. That Julius has no plot of his own and is described by use of reference to myth and external action, provides an image of Julius's vanity and fantasy self, not what might be the "real", *individual* Julius I can imagine that I see a glimpse of in these passages.

There is, however, more to say about the near-lack of plot in Julius's story. In the discussion of Ricoeur and character, I pointed out his suggestions of different possibilities for "escap-

ing”, or negating the plot of a narrative. This has relevance to discussion of the above. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* has several stories of “loss of identity” in which the characters in different ways escape their plots. Tallis will, in losing himself, (potentially) find his true self. Simon, in his story of “apprenticeship”, loses his young boy identity but gradually develops a new identity as he becomes a truthful and empowered adult. Morgan loses her identity (literally when Rupert “falls in love” with her on the basis of letters that are not her own) but never truly matures. She remains more or less “lost” throughout the novel. Julius has no plot internal to the narrative. He observes the others, and nothing ever happens to him. As indicated in connection with the mentioned discussion on Ricoeur, there is an aspect of Julius’s plot which is external to the narrative. Therefore, it is ambivalent with respect to the reader’s possibility to construct a character on its basis (this partially applies to Tallis as well).

The new information about his youth at the end of the novel does, however, to a certain extent challenge the image one has had of Julius. Identifying him as a victim can function as an explanation of his behaviour. How can the experience of evil (Holocaust) affect a moral sensibility? Can an explanation for evil release a moral subject from responsibility? Does knowledge about a person’s suffering proffer empathy from the other? Such questions enter the dialogue, and somewhat destabilize the givenness of Julius’s evil character. In the end, though, this information turns out to nothing more than just that: information which is never integrated in the narrative. It does not provide wholeness of character, and has no real impact on the story. A degree of uncertainty arises as to whether or not a reading of Julius as pure evil is a fair interpretation of him, but in the very last chapter, where Julius finally is focalized, there is little evidence that there is any depth to his character. But is this so?

In the chapter in the close reading titled “Power and Submission” I discussed several different interesting aspects which can highlight the complexity of the character Julius. Not least, a certain ambivalence occurs regarding his role as the representation of evil. I shall return to two such instances here. At one point Julius echoes the words of the female mystic Julian of Norwich, when he compassionately says to Simon: “Don’t fret, child. All manner of thing shall be well.” (FHD:170).³²⁶ In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch mentions Julian of Norwich and her mystical revelations in the context of a longer discussion of what she calls Schopenhauer’s determinist “religious doctrine”. In this passage are several hints at possibilities for an interpretation of Julius. Says Murdoch:

³²⁶ Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.1.

Mystical writings usually take ordinary virtue for granted; that is, the approach to God or Avatar (or Form of the Good) is achieved not through any annihilation of the world, but by a purification of virtue (...). Love of God, love of Good, love of your neighbour. This would seem, as in the Platonic pilgrimage, to involve the world in all its variety. Schopenhauer's 'religious doctrine', (...) is marred by his idea of the world as given over to an evil Will from which escape is achieved by the (almost impossible) move which annihilates self and world. (MGM:73)

Firstly, a comment on the passage can open up to an identification of the complexity of Julius as *type*. There is much evidence in the novel that Julius can be interpreted as a personification of such "evil Will". If this is so, he represents what Murdoch identifies as a fallacy, namely the Schopenhauerian, pessimistic view of morality. She thereby identifies Julius with what she sees as a "marred" view of the moral world. Thus, her literary exploration of evil represented in Julius does not only resonate with her own philosophical view of evil as vanity, but contains several alternative images in one. Earlier in the same chapter of the close reading, Julius was identified with the "Luciferian Man-God", a Murdochian personification of the anthropology of philosophy: what she calls "Kantian-behaviourist-existential". The human is reduced to being described by science, and morality is concerned with action and will, not consciousness or attention. This image of the human is, according to her, a fantasy, a consolation. This is one of Murdoch's pet enemies, and represents a view of evil which differs from her own. Further, Julius is also portrayed as chaos, which echoes an Augustinian view of evil. (I shall return to this soon.) The Biblical Satan and the Adversary from the book of Job are also activated as intertextual references to Julius. Finally, (certain aspects of) the Human Monster (such as Frankenstein's monster) and the Vampire can be identified in Julius. These might be interpreted as symbols of the shadow side of the human psyche (among other interpretations). Thus, Julius represents a multitude of different "myths" of what evil is. He is "almost all myth".³²⁷

An interpretation of Julius as Schopenhauerian "evil Will" makes sense in with regard to Murdoch's description in the passage above. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* Rupert escapes from the world "given over to an evil Will" only by death, as Leonard will too. Morgan, Hilda and Peter escape the "evil Will" by moving to their new world, thus annihilating their world of old. Simon, Axel and to a certain extent Tallis, are not defeated by this "evil Will", because they go down a different road: that of purification of virtue, of loving the other. The refer-

³²⁷ I shall not discuss all these references, but they (and several others) are all well known in literary explorations. To this, see for instance: Bataille, Georges: *Literature and Evil*, USA 1997 (1st edition: *La Litterature et le Mal*, France 1957). McGinn, Colin: *Ethics, Evil and Fiction*. Oxford 1997. Shepard, Leslie (ed.): *The Dracula Book of Great Vampire Stories*. New Jersey 1977.)

ences to both mystics (Julian of Norwich) and Schopenhauer are thus significant to understanding Murdoch's use of the concept "unselfing", which does *not* mean annihilation of self, but to love what is other in the mystical sense: God, good or neighbour.

The name-likeness of Julius and Julian is noteworthy, and this leads me to a second point, namely that of Julius's ambivalence. In his whisper to Simon, "all manner of thing shall be well", he appears as transformed into a benign woman mystic. If we turn to the text of the *Revelations* itself, it includes an explanation to Julian's words uttered by Julius. Of two explanations, one is particularly interesting regarding Julius and his role and function in the novel:

Another understanding is this, that there be deeds evil done in our sight, and so great harms taken, that it seemeth to us that it were impossible that ever it should come to good end. And upon this we look, sorrowing and mourning therefor, so that we cannot resign us unto the blissful beholding of God as we should do. And the cause of this is that the use of our reason is now so blind, so low, and so simple, that we cannot know that high marvellous Wisdom, the Might and the Goodness of the blissful Trinity. And thus signifieth He when He sayeth: THOU SHALT SEE THYSELF if all manner of things shall be well.³²⁸

It is as if this is a silent speech from Julius to Simon, in which the "truth" of the proceedings of the story is revealed. In the close reading, Simon was identified as the passive observer: there have been "evil deeds done in his sight". Here, Julius represents the voice of hope, the prophet of what is to come for Simon. It provides a clue too understanding that Julius might not be "purely evil", or perhaps it is more correct to say that it induces uncertainty as to what evil might be. Julian's vision is only minutely echoed in the novel, and is not a very clear reference. But it is there. This is significant, however, because it is part of a pattern that intensifies Julius's mysteriousness. The instances which are counter to *type* are difficult to identify. His inner life remains obscure, but the references to his vulnerable humanity nevertheless offer hints as to Julius's complexity. For the rest he appears as the stereotype of flamboyant and powerful Mephisto-like characters of literary tradition. In his comment to Simon here (and later at the poolside), it is almost as if his goodness must be hidden from the reader. This could echo the narratives of the Gospel, in which Jesus forbids people to proclaim his miracles.³²⁹ The implication is, either way, that Julius cannot be understood at face value. Therefore, much of the driving force of the novel concerns the question "Who, or what, is Julius?"

³²⁸ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, The Thirteenth Revelation, Ch. XXXII v.62ff, (<http://www.ccel.org/j/julian/revelations/htm/xiv.vi.htm>, 11.10.2003)

³²⁹ For instance in Mark 3:12 or 5:43.

In other words, “Who, or what, is evil?” I shall now discuss two metaphors with intertextual reference as a partial help to a further interpretation of Julius: the vampire, and the sea-monster Leviathan.

The view of evil as inversion, or perversion, of the good, can be identified in the vampire motif. There are several hints in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* that Julius is like a vampire: the gothic imagery provides a suggestive frame for this. Morgan often holds her hands protectively at her throat in Julius’s presence and feels that he “devours her entrails”. He does not eat garlic, speaks with a slight central European accent, is distinguished, often wears a cape and looks rather like the popular version of Count Dracula (dark hair, high brow and so forth). The image and myth of the vampire has many different roots in literary and folkloric traditions: “There is an underlying morality in these tales which symbolizes ancient mysteries of life beyond the grave, the decay of the body, the strange passions of the blood, and the age-old struggle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul.”³³⁰ This struggle can, in Christian tradition, be interpreted in terms of the vampire being an inversion of Christ. To drink the blood of a vampire gives eternal life. This is a perversion of the Eucharist. The vampire’s hatred for crosses attests this. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* the vampire motif symbolizes the struggle between Tallis and Julius. It is also a comment on the complexities of the image of ‘unselfing’ as “death of the ego”, for the image of the “Undead” raises questions such as what is death? What is life? Not least, Julius as vampire provides his narrative with a strong sense of myth, and casts him as a *type* who is familiar, given and recognizably evil.

The second intertextual reference which is deeply significant to my interpretation of Julius, not least with respect to the ambiguity he represents, is the powerful archetypal image of Leviathan. The reference to Leviathan occurs in the scene in which the power balance between Simon and Julius is turned. In the water, Julius appears to be like a monster.³³¹ The reference at this point is subtle, as Leviathan is never named. As will become clear, however, there are several textual elements that can attest this as a possible interpretation. I shall discuss this metaphor in some detail, as it illuminates many aspects of the story of Julius, and provides insight that yet again can disrupt a simple reading of Julius as *type*.

In the close reading of the exposition of the novel, I made the point that Julius can be identified both as creator and destroyer and the Leviathan-motif is a help to develop this ambiguity

³³⁰ Shepard: *The Dracula Book of Great Vampire Stories*, p.13.

³³¹ Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.2.c.

further.³³² This pattern of creation and destruction as being indistinguishable is present as an aspect in the ancient myths we find in the Bible and texts similar to it. Northrop Frye makes a point of the fact that Leviathan (who he visualizes as a dragon) is chaos or nothingness, and it is death and it is evil. Says Frye:

The creation results from the dragon's death because the dragon is death, and to kill death is to bring to life. In contrast to many other mythological systems, in the Bible the dragon seems to be a consistently sinister image. This is not only because it's antisocial habits of breathing fire and eating virgins, but because, of all sinister animals, it has the unique advantage of not existing, and so admirably symbolizes the paradox of evil (...)³³³

In the apocryphical text of II Esdras vi. 49-53, Leviathan is a part of the creation. God created the two great monsters, Leviathan and Behemoth on the fifth day. The Book of Enoch describes the becoming of Leviathan (and Behemoth) at what seems to be both the beginning and the end of time: "And that day will two monsters be parted, one monster, a female named Leviathan in order to dwell in the abyss of the ocean over the fountains of water; and (the other), a male called Behemoth".³³⁴ In the book of Job, Leviathan appears in a long vision towards the end of the text:

His (...) eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.³³⁵

Imagery from Julius in the Fosters' swimming pool is recognizable in this passage: the "boiling pool", the "wildness" of his eyes, his red tongue in the open mouth which is like a flame. Further, in the book of Job, Leviathan is male in contrast to Enoch's female Leviathan. The ambiguous gender of the Leviathan corresponds to something we have earlier seen in Julius's story, namely his unidentifiable sexuality.³³⁶ The point here is to show how the ambiguities of the Leviathan-myth correspond to Julius's complexity. Interestingly, the Leviathan-texts leave the paradox of what evil is and where evil "lives" unsolved: is Leviathan/Satan outside or inside creation?³³⁷ Does evil have existence, or does it not? These are all unsolved in *A Fairly*

³³² Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.1.a.

³³³ Frye: *The Great Code*, p.188.

³³⁴ 1 Enoch 60:7-8

(http://www.bibleandscience.com/bible/books/genesis/genesis1_leviathan.htm, 15.10.2003)

³³⁵ *The Bible*, Job 41:18-21.

³³⁶ Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.1.b.

³³⁷ Frye argues that Leviathan and Satan are *metaphorically* identical: *The Great Code*, p.194.

Honourable Defeat as well. Is Julius part of humanity, or is he outside it? Is he “real”, or does he only *appear* to be what he presents himself as?

A further ambivalence in the mythology is relevant to the present analysis of Julius, namely the issue of *power and submission*. In Job (and Enoch), Leviathan is the strongest creature on earth: “Upon earth there is not his like, a creature without fear. He beholds everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride.”³³⁸ This corresponds to the characteristic traits of Julius as they have been developed in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. He is unique, and “above” the others. He is King over the “sons of pride” (particularly over Morgan and Rupert, but over the others, too). However, in the scene in the swimming-pool, Julius is *not* powerful. Quite the reverse, in fact. How then, does he relate to the Leviathan of Job?

Some of this complexity can be identified by turning to other Biblical texts in which there are references to Leviathan. For instance, in Isaiah, we find the judgemental motif in which the monster Leviathan is *crushed* by God:

In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.³³⁹

This corresponds quite closely to the image of Julius in the pool. There he is helpless, not strong. In the water of the pool, he is an elusive, twisting serpent. Recalling the opening chapters of the novel, the cosmic construction of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* stages Julius as the *serpent* in Paradise. In this sense, it would seem that he is now up for judgement. In a simple transfiguration, however, one would expect that this is where the “dragon of the sea will be slain by the Lord”. However, this does not happen. The Lord, or God, is not present. Julius is not destroyed by God. He gets out of the water, and continues his manipulation of Simon and the others, ultimately driving Rupert to his death. The discontinuity with the myth is important, for it raises an important question: where is God? We have seen that Leonard represents God in this novel. But he is an impotent and dying God, certainly not capable of slaying Julius. In the close reading’s analysis of “The Notting Hill Trinity”,³⁴⁰ Leonard opens the chapter with a long lamentation which echoes the language of Job, but from the perspective of God. In this speech, he mentions Leviathan and Behemoth, albeit indirectly. He discards them, thus perverting his type: “...the damned irrelevant rubbish about the elephants and the

³³⁸ *The Bible*, Job 41,33-34.

³³⁹ *The Bible*: Isaiah 27:1.

³⁴⁰ Cf. Part III, Chapter 8.1.c.

whales and the morning stars and so on (...)” (FHD:105). Leonard is certainly *not* going to join the cosmic battle between good and evil, cosmos and chaos. He has no interest in victory over Leviathan.

In much Christian lore, Leviathan becomes identical to the whale that swallows Jonah, the reluctant prophet. This symbol has much in common with the structure of the story of Christ’s descent to Hell, and also with Plato’s cave-myth. These are, as we have seen, symbols of significance in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, as in most of Murdoch’s novels. However, we do not only find Leviathan in the ancient tradition. The Leviathan myth has had enormous impact in the history of thought in Europe, philosophically, theologically and politically. Most significantly, Leviathan features strongly in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). Here Milton retells the story of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from paradise. It is a narrative in which Satan (who is in part symbolized by Leviathan) is the active and calculating protagonist from the very beginning,³⁴¹ which is parallel to Julius’s role in the novel. The title *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* alludes to the logic of the meaning in the title *Paradise Lost*. More than a century after Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*, the Romantics Blake, Shelley and Byron reread the poem from a new perspective: as if Satan, not the omnipotent God, was the real hero. Milton’s descriptions of Satan are majestic and charismatic and correspond quite closely to characterizations of Julius throughout the novel.³⁴²

The Romantic reading of Milton gives cause to reflect on something which until now, has only fleetingly been discussed with respect to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It has been taken for granted that the “honourable but defeated” character in the novel is Tallis. “Good” puts up a worthy fight, but loses in the end. What if this is seen from a different perspective? That the whole construction of the character Julius is in fact an echo of the romantic view. It is possible. Julius is, in a sense, a hero. He is certainly the most interesting and fascinating of the characters, and probably the most complex one as well. An interesting ambivalence in the title now occurs: maybe it actually is *Julius* who is the one who is honourably defeated? What if Julius in the pool actually *is* the defeated Leviathan, and thereby continues the myth? This would, in fact, make sense from the point of view of Simon’s story, who has a certain power over Julius at the end of the novel. In addition, Simon’s story has a happy ending. His problems with Axel become sorted out, and as a couple they become closer than they were in the

³⁴¹ Schumacher, Jan: “Milton” in: Eriksen, Trond Berg: *Vestens Tenkere Vol I*, Oslo 1993 (465-480), p.466.

³⁴² See, for instance, *Paradise Lost* Book I, lines 589-612, (<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/lost/pl1.html>_16.10.2003)

beginning. There are no final answers to this, and there is scope for several interpretations. Such ambiguity is a significant aspect of the dialogism of this novel.

The last noteworthy cultural reference to Leviathan, is to the political treatise *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes from 1651.³⁴³ Here, Leviathan is the state, the artificial “prince of darkness” who is set to govern a society of egoistic individuals who would self-destruct without a powerful, all-encompassing leadership. The implicit political philosophy is not so relevant for my purposes, but the underlying anthropology is. Hobbes is a materialist-scientist, as is Julius. Many of Julius’s views concerning humanity, power, evil and society echo a Hobbesian view:³⁴⁴

‘Philosophy, philosophy,’ said Julius. ‘All human beings fly from consciousness. Drink, love, art are methods of flight. Philosophy is another one, perhaps the subtlest of them all. Even subtler than theology.’

‘One can at least attempt to be truthful, Julius. The attempt has meaning.’

‘About these things, no. The Venerable Bede observed that human life was like a sparrow that flies through a lighted hall, in one door and out the other. What can that poor sparrow know? Nothing. These attempted truths are tissues of illusion. *Theories*. (...) [W]e talk a lot of nonsense about art really, dear Rupert. What we actually experience is minute and completely ambiguous compared with the great long tale we tell ourselves about it.’ (FHD:222-3)

Hence, in Julius King we find the powerful “prince”, a hero whose mission is to reveal to the human soul what man’s true nature is, i.e. nothing but a violent animal whose life is powered by moving towards that which it desires for itself. When Julius is read as Hobbesian Leviathan, his governing power over humanity is legitimate. Hobbes and Milton are different thinkers, both as political philosophers (strong state/leader versus government by the people), and as religious thinkers. A difference between them which is to the point in this context, concerns their views on authority. For Hobbes, authority is the result of a fictitious contract between the people and the state, in which the people give up their own authority to the government in order to prevent war between the people.³⁴⁵ Milton writes against censorship in *Aeropagica* from 1644. Here, he sees authority as that which arises from the grappling be-

³⁴³ “This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal god to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence. For by this authority, given him by every particular man in the Commonwealth, he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him that, by terror thereof, he is enabled to form the wills of them all, to peace at home, and mutual aid against their enemies abroad.” Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, 1651. E-text at (http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas_hobbes/leviathan.html, 16.10.2003)

³⁴⁴ See Storheim, Eivind: “Thomas Hobbes” in: Eriksen, Trond Berg (ed.): *Vestens Tenkere Vol. II*, Oslo 1993, (70-84).

³⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. XVII.

tween truth and falsehood, trusting that freedom of speech will ultimately (eschatologically) lead to understanding.³⁴⁶ The images echo a difference between differing views on authority which I identified in Part I, namely the difference between the hierarchy and the network as images by which to understand authority.³⁴⁷ These have been developed further in a different metaphor, namely as the difference between external (monologic) authority and internally persuasive (dialogic) authority.³⁴⁸ This distinction provides me with a helpful tool to identify aspects of moral authority in the novel. Julius could represent an authoritarian despot (or monological non-relational “truth”) whose attempt to force the other characters to shed their illusions leads to death and destruction. In such a paradigm, Tallis is authoritative insofar as he enters into true relations with the others (the incarnation-motif), and although he is too late, induces a degree of insight and moral maturity in the others. This interpretation of what the characters represent is the one which has been prevalent in the analysis so far, and is – notwithstanding the suggestion of an alternative in the present discussion – a reasonable reading of the text.

The mythical imagery of Leviathan and its function in theology and philosophy nevertheless holds forward a shift of perspective that disrupts any certainty regarding the “simple” reading above. For instance, when Simon turns the power-balance and thus pierces the veil of subordination and secrecy which is ruining him and his relationships, he can only do this *in relation* to Julius. Their pushing each other into the pool is physical, and although they are enemies, their actions are reciprocal. Thus, Julius is *part* of the relation. In Bakhtinian terms, he enters into a (manner of) dialogue with Simon. It is still possible to cast Julius as a negative figure in the novel, but he is no longer unequivocally *type*. Such a modification of Julius’s story includes, therefore, the possibility of a certain degree of individuality. When Simon causes Julius to panic in the pool and his “reality” is exposed, he causes the symbolic death of Leviathan in which chaos/nothingness is conquered. It is, therefore, a *creation* in which Julius *becomes* a true “other”. Precisely because of this otherness, he becomes integral to Simon’s moral development. Further, in the crushing of vanity and exposure of the characters’ egos,

³⁴⁶ “And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing.”

Milton, John, *Aeropagica*, 1644. E-text translated by Boss, Judy, The University of Oregon 1997, (<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/%7Erbear/aeropagica.html>, 14.10.2003)

³⁴⁷ Cf. Part I, Chapter 2.2.c

³⁴⁸ Cf. Part IV, Chapter 10.3.

Julius becomes *part of* reality. The Leviathan-motif illuminates, therefore, a possible casting of Julius as a different kind of evil than what has been prevalent in my reading of the novel. The important point I wish to make, is that both readings are possible. Just as the Leviathan-myth is complex and ambiguous, the characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* are complex and ambiguous. It is precisely in this that the authoritative power of this particular novel is to be found. There is no *simple* authorial voice which penetrates the text as monologic discourse. Although Murdoch the philosopher's voice is represented, there will always be a different voice, a voice which disrupts the clear-cut interpretation of the "moral" of the story.

b) Character, Moral Authority and Evil

I have concentrated this analysis of Julius on several "clusters" of symbols and metaphors which show that Julius as *type* is as 'unreal' as Tallis as *type*. Julius does not, however, represent 'unself', but the 'fantasy self' – the vain, conflated ego, which, for Murdochian, *is* the "form" of evil. He is, though, as Tallis is, an ambivalent character. Just as important as recognizing him as *type* in and through symbolic representation has been to see inversions of the symbols, and instances of individuality which have served as an internal challenge to my construction of Julius as a character. This destabilization of the given, stereotypic image of evil, is the result of a dialogic process in which my voice has entered a discussion with that of Murdoch the philosopher and the narrator and characters of the novel.

Of particular interest in this analysis of Julius has been that the exposure of his individuality reduces the power of his *type*. This is quite different to what the story of Tallis, and the insights which interpretations of him as being an oscillation between *type* and *individual*, can provide to a further development of the problem of moral authority. Tallis as *type* (as a representative of good) gains authority when his goodness is actualised in his *individuality*. When formal ideas become substantial (through a complex movement between being, nothingness and action) such substance in consequence also gives credibility to Tallis as *type*. In the case of Julius, however, the exposure of his *individuality* reduces the credibility and authority of him as *type*. Violence and vanity are counter to the true (ideal) self, the self who understands him or herself inherently in relation to the other. In other words: *good* gains authority when true selfhood (unself) is developed and acted upon in relation to oneself and the other, while *evil* loses its power to motivate action as a "true self" (ego) is exposed.

14.4. Images of the Human Soul - Morgan Browne

a) A Portrait of “The Human Soul”

The former two sub-chapters have both been concerned with the identification of the ambiguity of moral concepts, or moral words. This has been studied in an examination of Tallis and Julius as representations of abstract concepts. I have identified the manner in which they are given person-like form in a literary context, and developed this in further detail by studying them as oscillating between their portrayal as *type*, respectively *individual*. Julius and Tallis *are*, in a sense, “moral words”. They have been embodied (represented) in the text by an authorial voice (Murdoch) and interpreted by a reader (me) in a process which can be interpreted in terms of a dialogue of many other, and different, voices who enter, and who all represent alternative perspectives by which to study the problem. This hermeneutic dialogue has been the “place” for an exploration of the central question “*what makes us convinced as to what is truly good and evil...?*”

Murdoch sees morality as concerned with consciousness: “Where virtue is concerned we often apprehend more than we clearly understand and *grow by looking*. (...) I have spoken of a process of deepening, or complicating, a process of learning, a progress, which may take place in moral concepts.” (SOG:31) In a sense, the studies of Tallis and Julius have been precisely this: a process (and hopefully a progress) of learning within moral concepts. As such, the literary analysis of narratives has shown how dynamic structures around and within stories can illuminate how a relational understanding of both selfhood and character is essential to being able to grasp what ‘good’ or ‘evil’ might be. The analysis has also shed light on the difficulties inherent in such a project. Good and evil are hard to see, and they can be ambiguous. What appears to be evil might not be, and it is the same with good. Thus, the analyses of both Tallis and Julius have provided a language of metaphors by which to visualise and articulate the hard but necessary process of identifying and challenging given conceptions of moral concepts.

The present study of literary characters has, however, a twofold impact with respect to the problem of moral authority: that moral concepts must be seen as hermeneutically developed relational constructions is only a partial answer to the problem as I have posed it in this thesis. The second half is crucial: *...and what gives us the motivation to live (act) in accordance to such conviction?* The problem now, therefore, concerns the deep and dynamic relation between moral conviction expressed in language on the one hand, and on the other, the problem

of living a life in accordance to one's conviction. The relation between these two aspects of the problem is not linear. We do not first "know" and in consequence willingly act upon our knowledge. Moral life and moral authority is much more complicated than this. Particularly if, as I have argued earlier, moral language is not "scientific and objective", but develops in an unfinalizable tension of incommensurable differences between the universal and the particular, between the objective and the subjective, between the external and the internal, and between language and agency. The place for this tension is, as I have argued throughout the thesis, in the individual character – provided 'character' is understood as a radically relational interpretative construction.

So, what are the implications of this for my work? In order to answer, I shall return to a rather more simple Murdochian observation and start from there: "Human relationship is no doubt the most important, as well as the first, training, and testing ground of morality." (MGM:17) I agree with her in this. And in combination with a mimetic understanding of literature it means, therefore, that I can study a novel as an image of what "human relationship" is about. The time has come to focus on Morgan, who, according to Murdoch herself, represents "the Human Soul". Morgan's story, a narrative which includes both a struggle within herself as well as tension between her and the other characters, provides a testing ground for an exploration of moral agency, which is the issue at the heart of this second half of the problem. The attention will now turn to the moral meaning of good and evil in a wider sense – in morality as such. Language in general and moral concepts in particular are only interesting insofar as they are embedded in, or stand in relation to, the context of human life reality (for the time being: as it is represented in literature). For

...words themselves do not contain wisdom. Words said to particular individuals at particular times may occasion wisdom. Words, moreover, have both spatio-temporal and conceptual contexts. We learn through close attention to objects, and we can only understand others if we can to some extent share their contexts. (Often we cannot). (SOG:32)

In the analysis of the character Morgan, therefore, the aim is to show that her story brings to the foreground the dynamic of an internal and external quest for wholeness (not one-ness) of character: an authoritative and dynamic narrative of selfhood, identity and morality. To identify Morgan as "the Human Soul" cannot, however, be done without some qualification. What might Murdoch mean by it, and further: what is the implication of the identification for this analysis? First of all, in identifying Morgan in light of an authorial intention, there is a danger that I adopt a Murdochian perspective to a further extent than I would wish to do. To this, I

will point out that the distinction between *type* and *individual* enables me to discuss critically if the image of Morgan as “the Human Soul” is adequate or not. This distinction will not be as prominent in this analysis as it was in those of Tallis and Julius, but is nevertheless present as an analytic tool which can secure a critical distance to Murdoch’s authority as “externally given”.

For Murdoch, the fact that morality has to do with a discerning consciousness, means that one as a human must be free. Freedom *is* consciousness: a freedom to see and truly attend to reality as it is, and to avoid the unconscious veil of consolation. This is, however, an ideal limit which is not possible to achieve. There are only degrees of freedom, which is reflected in that the human is both animal and soul (or consciousness). In the close reading I mentioned several times that Morgan is likened to a bird. Julius once says the following about human life, in which the harsh truth of reality is connected to the poor prospects for consciousness:

The Venerable Bede observed that human life was like a sparrow that flies through a lighted hall, in one door and out the other. What can that poor sparrow know? Nothing. These attempted truths are tissues of illusion. (FHD:222-3)

That Morgan and Simon both are portrayed as small animals in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is, therefore, significant regarding their relative freedom and the difficulties they face in the moral pilgrimage towards clear vision and freedom. Moral language is, according to Murdoch, a function of perception, and we “grow by looking”. Morgan says again and again that she can *see clearly*. This always turns out to be an illusion, and is illustrated materially in that she is short-sighted and *cannot* see reality “as it is”. Says Murdoch:

I have suggested that we have to accept a darker, less fully conscious, less steadily rational image of the dynamics of the human personality. With this dark entity behind us we might sometimes decide to act abstractly by rule, to ignore vision and the compulsive energy derived from it; and we may find that as a result both energy and vision are unexpectedly given. (SOG:44)

A fundamental aspect of perception for Murdoch, therefore, is to accept that one cannot always see clearly and that “the dynamics of human personality” is complex, opaque and ambiguous. It is, in practice, impossible for the human to “become good”. It is precisely because of this that the character Morgan, in her failure to become good, provides an interesting image of the difficult and humbling moral task of the human. From this point of view, it is a study of Morgan, not Tallis, which can give access to understanding what a good life means. In other words, the metaphor ‘Morgan’ sheds light on the argument that ethics is not only about what action is ‘right’, or to seek the definition of a metaphysic ‘good’. Rather, it is to focus one’s

attention the “who” of action, accepting the limitations of what one can reasonably know about oneself, others and life. Therefore, as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ the metaphors ‘Tallis’ and ‘Julius’ are first truly significant *within* Morgan’s story. Neither the good man nor the evil man exists. Literary attempts to portray them will usually end in stereotypic representations of given cultural ideas. The human exists, however. The character Morgan is a personification of the difficult human task of piercing the illusion that one can attain final knowledge of “what” good and evil is. From this point of view, her story is more credible than either Tallis’s or Julius’s are. In other words, the focus here is to articulate what Morgan’s story can provide with respect to attaining deeper insight into what conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ can mean when they enter the struggle of the individual’s attempt to live a moral life. And further, in identifying with this struggle, the task of one’s own moral life can be illuminated and challenged.

Morgan’s “ordeal” is the difficult search for selfhood, and its plot can best be described as *a moral pilgrimage*. Her central struggle throughout *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is to learn to know and love her true self. She mistakenly believes that she can find this through suffering and submission. Her story is therefore one of a continuity of dysfunctional love stories. As I have shown in the close reading, all these love stories effectively build her ego, not her true self. The more she seeks validation, the more she becomes alienated from herself. This pattern is recognizable in Murdoch the philosopher’s description of the double possibility of love:

Falling in love is for many people their most intense experience, bringing with it a quasi-religious certainty, and most disturbing because it shifts the centre of the world from ourself to another place. A love relationship can occasion extreme selfishness and possessive violence, the attempt to dominate that other place so that it be no longer separate; or it can prompt a process of unselfing wherein the lover learns to see, and cherish and respect, what is not himself. (MGM:16-17)

Morgan’s quest is counter to ‘unselfing’: in cultivating her ego, she does not see the separateness of the other. In this, her story attests one of my central claims: That the acceptance of radical difference (incommensurable plurality) is fundamental to being a true, relationally conditioned self. Morgan believes that she knows who Tallis and Julius are, and that she loves them. But what she loves, and what she lets into her life, is her own image of them. They are, therefore, not necessarily who they appear to be. Morgan never actually sees the men – or in other words: evil and good – as they are, but solidifies her own images. Because she can only see them from the perspective of her fantasy self, she never truly develops a *true* self, nor

does she achieve a dynamic, internal reflectivity within herself, which I have argued, is a condition for autonomy and authority.

Morgan wishes to be “whole”, but there is a tragic sense of disintegration through much of the narrative. In the beginning of the novel, she “cannot tell a story”. Her narrative (and self) is disjointed and fragmented. When she speaks, she often stumbles, uttering fragments of sentences with only loose internal connection. She is torn between Tallis and Julius. During the story, Peter and Rupert contribute to a further “pulling apart” of her sense of a true self. She breaks an ornamental vase in Julius’s flat. Tallis keeps trying to mend a broken necklace that Morgan had left in their house. Simon and Hilda both see themselves as “picking up the pieces” of Morgan.

This motif raises the important question of unity. How is the unity of a life to be understood? In my definition of moral authority, for instance, a unity between language and agency is necessary for its qualification. In the earlier discussion of the narrativist positions of Hauerwas and MacIntyre, I argued against coherence and unity as ideals for character (and the moral life) on the basis that such a telos conflates the plurality of perspectives which is necessary for reflexivity internal to character. I did, however, argue in favour of the term “integration” as necessary to counter an idealization of fragmentation. Here I will introduce the ideal of “wholeness” as a possible interpretation of what unity can mean. Thus, the unity of a life does not mean one-ness, or coherence of perspective, but rather, on the contrary, that radically different perspectives can be understood in terms of a dynamic whole. Thus, disintegration can be seen as a problem with direct relevance to moral life: a disintegrated life does not provide the “space” in which the dynamic of a whole character in its tension between language and agency can take place. In the case of Morgan, she tries to counter her disintegration by seeking a one-ness which she partially achieves. It is, however, a fragile fantasy, a consolation. She senses this, and the knowledge causes her much anxiety.

The theme of anxiety, fragility and finitude of human life is developed in the important scene in which Morgan is in the Underground and tries to save a pigeon. In the close reading, I interpreted the scene as a symbolic death with the (never actualized) potential of being a turning point in Morgan’s life. I shall return to this scene, and study in closer detail the role of anxiety in Morgan’s story. Her emotional terror is profound, and her angst is reflected in the strongly visual image of the atmosphere in the underground:

Desperately and with more determination she reached up her hands. People hurried past her, shadows with anxious vague eyes. No one stopped, not one watched, no one

paid the slightest attention to what she was doing. (FHD:327)

The words in this passage recall expressionist paintings by Edvard Munch, in particular the famous *The Scream* and *Angst*. The references may or may not be intentional, but the verbal descriptions of Morgan's disturbing emotional state certainly echoes Munch's two paintings:

The scene shimmered and shook before her eyes, the row of blurred faces moved onward with mesmeric slowness, Morgan gripped the moving handrail, wanting to call out to him, but her tongue was leaden and a sort of large bright humming electric silence all about her held her motionless and wordless. (FHD:329)

The "shimmering and shaking" of the scene implies a hotness, like the air over a fire, or in this case: even hellfire. This signifies both the symbol of the fire in the cave as well as the death-theme in this passage. The people around her are "blurred faces" that move with "mesmeric slowness". They are like (ghostly) shadows, with "anxious vague eyes" that appear to be "unseeing". Vision is an important aspect of Morgan's underground experience, and it is not difficult to imagine this scene as inspired by the visual impact of expressionist art. In the painting *Angst*, the woman looks deeply worried and frightened, and her hands are held up in front of her in a gesture of protection. Morgan does this several times in the presence of Julius. The implication is that she is in the presence of evil, often in the symbolic form of a vampire about to draw life-blood from her.

Murdoch links the concept of *Angst* directly to the problem of the will in a discussion on in *The Sovereignty of Good*. The concept of *Angst* can therefore be used as an interpretative tool to understand the relation between Julius and Morgan. She describes *Angst* as "a kind of fright which the conscious will feels when it apprehends the strength and direction of the personality which is not under its immediate control." (SOG:38f). This is relevant to understanding Morgan's experience. She has no control over herself, having been bound by the force of Julius, both consciously (her desire for him which we have seen earlier) and unconsciously (the game Julius is playing on her and Rupert). The "direction of her personality" is therefore "downwards into the cave", towards the uncontrollable depths of the ego in which she seeks relationships where she is submissive and dependent. She has no will of her own. She often describes herself as being "bound by the consciousnesses" of Julius and Tallis. She realises that she cannot avoid the suffocation of the cave (her ego) other than by seeking true intimacy (a relationship in which she truly focuses her attention to the other), which is also impossible for her.

Further, Murdoch writes: “*Angst* may occur where there is any felt discrepancy between personality and ideals.” (SOG:39). This is yet a clue to seeing the underground-scene as particularly significant in Morgan’s story. Her anxiety is a reaction to a realization that she is bound by evil, coupled with the realization that she has no means of escaping from this. Her lack of power, her helplessness and vulnerability represents her awakening feeling of the discrepancy of what she is drawn towards (her ego) and what would be her salvation (‘unselfing’). Another aspect of ‘angst’, a deep fear of what Murdoch calls the void (or nothingness), arises as Morgan stands in the face of death. She experiences her own mortality, and can find no release from it. She and the bird have no immediate way out of their suffering. They will die whatever they do. They have no power in themselves to be released from the “warm dusty electric-lighted underground” (FHD:327). Her suffering in the underground is different from the self-imposed consoling suffering I have identified in the close reading as a theme which runs throughout most of her narrative. Here, suffering seems pointless but necessary. There is no comfort, no power – inverted or other. She is vulnerable and humbled in a way she has never been before. This is a possible turning point on her quest for true selfhood, love and virtue. Says Murdoch:

Goodness is connected with the acceptance of real death and real chance and real transcendence and only against the background of this acceptance, which is psychologically so difficult, can we understand the full extent of what virtue is like. The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves. (SOG:103)

This brings a familiar theme from Murdoch’s moral psychology into play: that of the necessity of accepting the randomness and pointlessness of life (SOG:104). Such an experience is profoundly connected to death, both real and symbolic death. The ideas of *unselfing* and loving *attention* directed to what is other than oneself, belong together in a logical union. There are several elements of these issues present in Morgan’s underground experience, but a straightforward and simplistic interpretation in these terms is not possible. First, however, it is relatively unproblematic to state that Morgan’s journey to the underground represents a symbolic death, a death in which she for a while loses her sense of selfhood. The death-imagery is present not only structurally, but by use of other references to hell, both directly and indirectly. The recognizable dual patterns of up/down, inside/outside, darkness/light belong to a traditional (Augustinian) Christian imagery of heaven/hell, as well as being profoundly Platonic. The use of metaphors thus captures the deathly atmosphere of Morgan’s experience. This symbolic death has a great significance in her story as a potential for goodness.

In an analysis of the character Bradley Pearson in Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince*, Martha Nussbaum argues that "not love but egoistic anxiety is the root of all the vices."³⁴⁹ For Murdoch, the possibility of erotic love is twofold: either it is an introspective activity which is *triggered by an anxiety* that one is no-one, with a corresponding need for acceptance and acknowledgement of one's ego. On the other hand, sexual love can give "wings of joy, a sense of the blotting out of self, a turning away from customary fears"³⁵⁰. This dual possibility is present in Morgan's story. Her search for self is driven by an anxiety of being nothing. She never truly experiences the 'unselfing' power of sex, but her story tells of a step towards it: in the scene from the Underground she faces her anxiety. This is the heart of her symbolic death. When she meets Peter afterwards she draws away from his touch. In her acceptance of angst she sees reality without seeking consolation.

Earlier in this discussion of Morgan, I identified her story as one in which human morality can be interpreted as *a moral pilgrimage*. What has been important in the analysis of Morgan has been to visualize the real moral problem of "growing". Human life reality is characterised by finitude and the fact that we cannot escape our egos. In Murdochian lingo: we cannot escape the cave. We can, however, take little steps in the right direction. There is a possibility of growing by attending to the other. A condition for this is humility: an acceptance of the reality that we do not know who the other truly is. It is in this that we can become ourselves. There are glimpses of Morgan's move in the right direction. That she does not use Peter for validation after her experience in the Underground is one. Another is when she, at the end of the novel she attends to Hilda as a person who is more than just her own personal saviour. Her love for Hilda is transformed as she sees her sister in a different light. She never completely resolves her relationships, and she continually believes that she finally can "see things as they are" – but in this, she resembles what is a profound reality of human moral progress: how difficult it is.

Morgan's story thus ends with a slight glimpse of hope, but is, all in all, a tragedy. Left at this, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* provides a pessimistic view of morality and of human life. There is, however, a different voice which penetrates this interpretation: namely the story of Simon. Throughout the close reading, I argued that Simon can be interpreted as a parallel figure to Morgan, a twin, a different perspective on the same story: *the moral pilgrimage*. Simon's

³⁴⁹ Nussbaum, Martha: "Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual" in: Antonacchio and Schweiker: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (p.29-53), p.44.

³⁵⁰ Nussbaum: "Love and Vision", p.44.

story is more hopeful than Morgan's. Significantly, he learns the true value of "turning around". The scene where he and Axel "change roles" in their sexual intimacy provided one of many such instances. Simon's story differs from Morgan's in that his true self becomes empowered. In his active motion of "stepping out" of submission in relation to Axel, Rupert and Julius, he finds true love and compassion for the other. By raising his voice in the face of evil power, he becomes an agent of good. In exposing the true realities behind appearances (for instance when he pushes Julius into the pool, or when he decides to tell Axel the whole truth about what had been going on in relation to Julius) – he represents the possibility of hope. His story, his moral apprenticeship, therefore, probably provides the best image in the novel by which to understand what human goodness is about.

b) Picturing The Other Characters: A Multiplicity of Images

The analyses of the characters Tallis, Julius and Morgan (and Simon) have all had as their background the complex web of relationships between the characters which have not been selected for closer scrutiny. Their stories are all intertwined, and they all represent different and particular explorations of the quest for self and the moral life. In both the close reading and the character analyses I have shown how the characters all, to some extent, are personifications of different approaches to, or perspectives on morality. Rupert personifies an idealistic moral philosophy which, in his death, is shown to lack a sense of what is real. His ideals are not attuned to the dark side of the psyche, or the complexities of selfhood. It is not difficult to identify him with the fallacies which Murdoch identifies in "contemporary moral philosophy", which she sees as a result of the Cartesian and existentialist influence:

...our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified with, an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin. (SOG:47)

A study of Axel's story could generate insight in the public-private aspect of ethics. Peter represents the shift of generations and systems of thought based on radically different rationalities. Hilda gives voice to a view that morality is about "common sense", ("pulling up one's socks") but the indirect access we have to her (through mirrors) indicates that this might not be this simple. Leonard's role in the narrative is crucial because of his absence. He is "there" in a sense, but only as an inhibiting element in the life of Tallis. This can signify that the conception of 'God' is a hindrance to 'Good'. Leonard is dying. He is transparent and inactive. The novel has, therefore in a sense, provided an image of a quest for a morality without God.

All in all, the *types* (different images of morality), and the *individuality* (embodied narratives) of the characters provide the novel with a multitude of represented voices. They provide resonance to other voices, and they seldom speak in harmony. I have shown several instances in which the voices complicate the interpretations I have provided in my analysis. I hope, however, that this can highlight one of the most significant aspects of the novel: its dialogism, and therefore, its internal persuasive authority.

14.5. Character, Moral Authority and Life

a) On Moral Authority: Sameness and Difference in Literary Analysis

In Part I, I formulated the problem of moral authority as follows: What makes us convinced as to what is truly good and evil, and what gives us the motivation to live (act) in accordance to such conviction? In order to suggest an answer to this question, I first need to provide a concluding response to the second of my operational questions. For in practical continuation of the wide, dual formulation of the central problem above, I asked a narrower question to be discussed with respect to literary analysis: How can one by help of literary analysis gain a deeper understanding of moral language and agency as substantially authoritative? In short, the concept of ‘character’ was introduced as a means of holding together a relationally constituted moral agent on the one hand, and on the other, dialogic reflexive subjectivity understood as internal to narrative. This hermeneutic understanding of character has provided the means of articulating a dynamic relation between selfhood and action, which corresponds to the double problem of moral authority with respect to both language and agency. I have also studied several aspects of this complex relation with respect to literary theory, philosophy and ethics. An appropriation of those insights to an analysis of particular literary characters has provided me with sufficient material and enough partial conclusions to suggest an answer to the literary problem of moral authority.

In order to conclude Part V with respect to character, relationality and moral authority, I shall use the now familiar dual perspective of *sameness* and *difference* as a tool in order to articulate some insights that the distinction between another duality (*type* and *individual*) has generated in the analyses of the characters Tallis, Julius and Morgan. I intend to show how this double set of distinctions can illuminate the contribution of literary analysis to an ethical dialogue on the development of substantial authority with regard to moral language and agency. In Part II, I introduced the methodological strategy of “relational readings”, in which the polyphony of the (represented) voices of the real author (behind the text), characters and narra-

tors (within the text) and real reader (in front of the text) all enter the dialogue.³⁵¹ Although it has been a key to my interpretations throughout the thesis, this interpretative approach will at this stage explicitly surface as crucial to the present conclusion.

One way to study the authoritative potential of a literary character is to seek *sameness* in the text, or in other words, to look for the overlap between *type* and *individual*. A further aspect of this is the question of identifying the reasons one has for expecting a certain *type*. The reader's question might then be in line with the following: "in what way does the narrative of a character whom I know (or expect) to be 'good' (or 'evil', or 'patriotic', or 'female') support and give credit to my assumption?"³⁵² For the character to be qualified as 'good' (or another concept), the narrative of the good individual will have to live up to the reader's prior expectations of what a good person would do. In effect, the *author's* conception of good, will, in such a situation, also be identifiable with the *reader's* conception of good. It will, further, be experienced as sameness of *type* (supported by the individual narrative of a given character). Many good characters in literature (and film) are quite simple, and can be interpreted in terms of such sameness (for instance Superman, Frodo, Neo or Robin Hood). They quite easily live up to the reader's expectations of what 'good' is. Such stories can be illustrative and enjoyable, but they are not necessarily particularly challenging with respect to moral language or agency. The question is whether or not such flat characters are credible representations of goodness. Can studies of them develop our convictions about, and the authority of, what goodness means? I suggest that they are (to some extent) trustworthy representations of conceptions of goodness, and therefore illuminate the issue of moral authority. How is this?

³⁵¹ I have not given much attention to the distinction between different levels of narration which is central to structuralist literary theory. This is primarily because, as I have argued earlier, my theoretical approach expands the scope of the text itself, which is a possibility foreign to narratology (Cf. Part II, Chapter 6.4.). It is, of course, crucial to be aware that the real author of a text differs from the implied author who again differs from the narrator(s). However, the (Bakhtinian) emphasis I place on the fact that no written voice is other than a *represented* voice which can be close to or distant from the "real" voice, and whose authority is challenged in dialogic relation, helps to secure at least some of the interpretative awareness that, for instance, Chatman speaks about in *Story and Discourse*, p. 147-151. A further (not so crucial) argument for not treating this set of distinctions in depth, is that *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is not a particularly sophisticated novel with respect to its narration. If my material had been, for instance, Murdoch's *The Black Prince*, the analytic situation would be rather different in this respect. (For example, in Stenseng, Maud Marion Laird: "Ambiguous Love in *The Black Prince*: Love and Special Relations in the Work of Iris Murdoch", (Unpublished) essay submitted for the post-graduate programme at The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, January 2002.)

³⁵² What I say about the relation between moral authority and literary analysis is developed on the basis of working with all the characters. For practical reasons, however, I shall concentrate my conclusions with respect to the analysis of Tallis, or 'good'.

A *sameness*-orientated interpretation of text can illuminate more or less opaque conceptualisations of what moral words “mean” to people.³⁵³ For instance, a study of a literary or filmic exploration (be it simple or complex) of what is considered to ‘be good’, can be instrumental to identifying given values and authoritative conceptions inherent to a particular person, society or culture (regardless if one shares these values or not).³⁵⁴ In the identification of such values they are exposed, or made transparent, thus providing a possibility for them to be critically evaluated. Such a process is crucial towards the moral agent’s understanding of what she as of now holds to be morally authoritative, a quest in which the primary question is (I quote myself): “what is the substantial content of a moral concept which on a wide basis can convincingly seen to be true?”

An interpretative search for *sameness* of character between *type* (here: formal idea) and *individual* (here: expression of content) has also been a relevant aspect of my study of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It has not been particularly difficult to find textual examples of identification between the idea of good we have seen inherent in the construction of Tallis on the one hand, and on the other, what Murdoch’s philosophical voice has had to say about ‘good’ (or, ‘The Idea of Perfection’). So, how can I then, according to Murdoch’s voice as it has been identified in the character Tallis as *type*, see and understand what is good? By seeing and recognizing it in real life, and in this: realising that it is difficult! Good is ambivalent. It is undefineable and elusive, but it is nevertheless so that good things happen between people. The task to see what is good is the difficult task of seeing the other with “loving attention”. The answers are never given once and for all, and what appears to be good might not be so. This is part of what being human is. The task of morality, therefore, is to discipline one’s consciousness in order to see clearly. It is to accept death and nothingness, and in this: to fight “the fat relentless ego”.

Has not the analysis confirmed this? I think it has. In a sense one could therefore say that Murdoch’s literary voice corresponds quite closely (or is *same*) to her philosophical voice. Thus, the question becomes whether or not one can say that the novel, and the relation between the author and her work, are truly dialogic instances. My conclusion is that the answer must be yes *and* no. The novel attests to Murdoch’s philosophical world view and, at least to

³⁵³ This applies regardless of whether or not one is a moral realist or a moral constructivist. The question of the reference of the moral concept is, in other words, not relevant to my problem.

³⁵⁴ To turn to a rather cheap, but illustrative stereotype: most Scandinavians will, for instance, react differently than most Americans to what many Hollywood blockbusters implicitly portray as being good, for example in the good president (national values), the good mother (family values)...

a certain extent, it does not bring much new insight with respect to this. As a novelist she does little more than develop further (and to some extent illustrate) what she as a philosopher says. However, a central theses in her philosophical work is that *there are no simple answers*. Inherent in philosophy, literature and life, therefore, there is an inescapable *difference* of perspectives. One can only attempt to approach an understanding of reality with a humble attitude. The metaphors of radical relationalism/hermeneutics (Ricoeur) and of polyphony and dialogue (Bakhtin) are “other” to Murdoch’s linguistic universe. But from studying her novels in dialogue with these voices, I have attempted to include these other languages in my expression of what it is, in fact, she does in her work – thus creating a space in which her voice is decentred and to some extent criticized.

Having said this, it is necessary to point out that looking for *sameness* between textual representation of ideas and one’s own expectation does not necessarily mean that one *finds* sameness. There may just as well be discrepancy: sometimes, the actions of a (so-called) good character will *not* correspond to the reader’s expectation of what a good character would do. In such cases, the difference between text and expectation challenges the interpreter. As a reader I must ask: did the narrative expression of the textual *individual* correspond to a different ideal *type* than that which I had expected? And if so, should I continue to hold my view on what I take to be good (or evil, or patriotic, or female) to be authoritative, or must I rethink it?

There are, as I see it, two strategies with which one can approach the problem of authority on the basis of experiencing *difference* when looking for *sameness*. The first is to continue the search for sameness, which is only to some extent a viable strategy. This corresponds to the earlier established hermeneutic understanding of difference as dichotomic. Such difference must, ultimately, be overcome in order for understanding to take place. In order to do so, one needs a reflective vantage point external to context, or singular narrative, from which to search for mistakes, or misunderstandings in the communication process. Is the authorial conception of good ‘wrong’ and therefore not convincing? Or does the a lack of coherence between the textual *type* and *individual* prove the text to be unintelligible (and thus, not authoritative)? Or am I as a reader mistaken, and must in consequence submit to the external authority that I have been exposed to? The search for the “right interpretation” in this sense can be described metaphorically as an argument between monologic voices. If one is ‘right’, the other is ‘wrong’. This strategy can at a certain level, and with some adaptations, be necessary. It may also be part of the attempt to establish what one holds to be (morally) authoritative or not, as I have indicated above.

The other strategy, however, is to turn to radical, dialogic hermeneutics, in which one acknowledges that there are limits for what a search for sameness can achieve. It involves paying careful attention to that the differences inherent in the interpreting experience might be incommensurable. It should not come as a surprise that I hold this to be a more fruitful and further reaching approach. The attention to tension, therefore, to the *difference* between *type* (expectation) and *individual* narrative will be likely to generate more profound challenges to the reader's identification and development of what she believes to be good. I have, in the literary analyses, shown that this is the case.

Not only this, but using the relationally complex concept of 'character' (based on the Ricoeurian distinction between 'idem' and 'ipse', and the emplotment of self in action) in order to attend to ambivalences internal to *type*, respectively *individual*, has also provided a level of dialogue which is formative of what I (or another reader) might reasonably hold to be the substantial content of a moral concept. A study of literary character in which the attention to ambiguities internal to narrative as well as the differences between interpretative perspectives have priority, can, therefore, do *more than* identify the hidden, authoritative values and conceptions in relation to which we (often unconsciously) become empowered as moral agents. A hermeneutic perspective from which the *individual*, relationally interpreted Tallis (or Julius, or Morgan) cannot be seen to correspond to *type*, can contribute further to understanding and speaking about what it means to be good (or evil, or human).

A literary analysis based on the sameness, or "wholeness" of a literary character can illuminate, therefore, but does not exhaust the authoritative meaning of "who" the character is, or what the character can meaningfully represent in terms of moral language and agency. Nor can a literary analysis based on difference reach final interpretations. But it will provide images of, for instance, 'good', or 'evil', or 'the human soul' which can enable a deeper understanding of moral language and agency as inescapably dialogic and relational and, therefore, carry the potential of being substantially authoritative.

To conclude the literary analysis on a rather more simple note than what the complexities of the analyses in this whole chapter on character and moral authority have provided: it is possible to interpret at least some aspects of Tallis's (and the others') ambiguous plot(s) as metaphors which provide dynamic images of the necessity of seeing (moral) authority in relation to the embodiment of moral concepts in action. As *type* alone, or formal idea, Tallis/'good' remains empty and carries little authoritative potential. He is only credible insofar that he becomes "incarnated", or real. His goodness has authority first when it is embodied in selfless

action, driven by a fundamental concern for ‘the other’. It is in this, therefore, that the announced study of the relation between form and content has provided a literary representation of a moral concept with authoritative substance.

By seeing Tallis’s story as a metaphor (in a wide sense), the image opens up to new understanding in the context of moral language. As a formal construction, therefore, ‘good’ carries only thin meaning (but not *no* meaning). Goodness truly comes into being (or in other words, its content is *substantially* constructed) through the thick and “real” action of the (relational) *individual*. The form, the ‘idea’, the meaning of the concept, gains authoritative potential for the moral subject only by understanding its complexity in terms of character as a relational structure. In other words: when external, monologic voices (for instance those of duties, laws, or cultural conceptions of what the good life is) are not imposed (from the top of the pyramid, so to speak), but actually permitted to enter the network structure of an individual’s internal dialogue, their authority becomes relativized, decentred, challenged and/or attested to. Thus, rules and obligations may well be held as authoritative for the individual. They are, however, only authoritative insofar that the moral agent has let herself be challenged by them *in dialogue*. Finally, the responsibility to be critical to what is either fixed and given, or subjectively relative, must be understood in terms of a double motion. Critique, or discerning attention needs, therefore, to be directed in two directions: an inwards motion towards the particular, embedded individual’s certainty as to what is right and wrong, good and evil on the one hand, and on the other, a motion outwards, towards those voices who enter the internal dialogue. All voices must be heard, and listened to in earnest.

b) Character as Moral Voice – Relationality as Ethical Dialogue

In the introduction to the thesis I provided a visual metaphor for my project: that of wandering in a field, following different paths and stopping at their intersections in order to see what the field looks like from there. I had practical aim for my exploration of the field: to study literary images of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in order to see why and how literature can contribute to insight in and understanding of the conditions for speaking about moral language, conviction and agency in human life reality. In other words, my criss-crossing in the field was a search for new perspectives on how one can possibly speak truthfully about morality in a contemporary context. I have, in short, argued that the conditions for such moral authority are established by undertaking a radically relational, dialogic quest for (hermeneutic) truth. Such a process can provide a means of developing dynamic and internally substantial constructions of (moral)

language and reality by which we can identify the good life with regard to both thought and action.

The *background* for the work I have done in this thesis was a conviction that a formal approach to moral language and ethics is insufficient on its own with respect to handling plurality and moral responsibility. Thus, my discussion has had as a broad *context* the wake of the critique of an enlightenment view of decontextualized rationality, truth and the individual. How can we meaningfully understand and use moral words such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in relation to human life reality in a theoretical situation informed by several different strands of postmodern perspectives? I wished to find ways to speak about morality which could serve as an alternative to discussions that operate within a dichotomy in which foundationalism is found at one extreme pole, and at the other, radical nihilistic relativism. A corresponding (but not identical) dichotomy I have wished to avoid, is that between universalist and particularist approaches to ethics and morals.

In continuation of this, the significance of a radically relational understanding of selfhood and language was identified on the basis of theoretical and methodological perspectives within hermeneutical theory. Such an anthropology (in a wide sense of anthropology) has determined my attempt to outline an approach by which to speak about the potential authority of moral language and character. The *thrust* of the thesis has, on this basis, been towards understanding how our constructions of the content of moral language can have persuasive, or authoritative, status with regard to action.

I have, both existentially and theoretically, been profoundly challenged by the practical experience of entering a hermeneutic reflective process with regard to stories about goodness and evil. In my attempts to look for what might be good, or evil, or what moral life is about, and further, to gradually be able to articulate how such things can possibly be identified and described, I entered a dialogue with what I initially held to be authoritative. Working so closely with the characters Tallis, Julius and Morgan has developed my understanding of what ‘good’ and ‘evil’ might be, and ultimately, provided deeper insight in the conditions for how one can speak about human (moral) life. The new perspectives I have gained from reading, symbolized by the voices I have included in my inner dialogue, have either *attested to* or *challenged* previous authoritative conceptions of what I meaningfully can hold to be good. My own voice has therefore changed in the duration of this dialogue. The *reasons* I have for what I believe to be central to a “good life” have, I think, become more internally substantial or, if you like: morally authoritative.

I have throughout the thesis attempted (as far as I have been able) to make my personal voice transparent during the dialogue with the different theorists and the literary text. Although it is ultimately impossible to transcend one's own situatedness it is, nevertheless, possible to establish a critical reflective voice (or perspective) within a subjective position.³⁵⁵ This strategy is inherent in what I understand to be the theoretical impact of the dialogic, hermeneutic approach I have taken: to take my embeddedness in the conversation seriously in order to reflect critically upon it through entering into dialogue with voices external to me. It is important that one's moral language is integrated in the wholeness of a character. It expresses a particular vision, and is not static. It is also important that language must be communicable. Dialogue, or conversation, involves respectful attention to views that are other than those that are familiar with, and to be willing to develop further one's moral language in accordance to this. Such theoretical claims are crucial to the work I have done as well as to the conclusion.

The degree of truth I can attest to concerning moral language is, therefore, based on and can never transcend a relational tension between the incommensurable poles of the subjective and the objective, the internal and the external, the particular and the universal. As long as I can reasonably believe the content of a moral word to be true (in a thick sense), however, I am as character responsible to live my life in accordance with it. The moral authority of a character is more than just rational argument. Conviction and action both belong to the experienced reality of being human, and each of these is continually challenged by the other. The quest for becoming a character with moral authority means that one never ceases to reflect critically over the meaning and reasonable (but always unfinal) truth of one's moral language and action. The mode of such reflection is to attend to the changing perspectives inherent to the dynamics of the relations *within selfhood* and *between self and other*.

As a real person interpreted in terms of character I have, both physically and metaphorically, only one voice. I cannot speak authoritatively with two tongues. I am, therefore, to borrow a familiar word: monologic. It is a task, however, to let this thin, single voice wisely represent an inner polyphony – the internal, thick, substantial, ethical dialogue which is my particular subjectivity. The concept of character in moral life, however, involves a double relational dialectic: it is, therefore also a task to make my voice accessible as an externally audible voice, in order for it to enter ethical dialogues other than my own.

³⁵⁵ This can also be described as a distinction between first and second order language, although the use of such terminology tends towards conditioning reflection as being from a point of view "above" experience (or outside, or from another, narrative), rather than interactively structured *within* narrative.

This has not only been a personal wandering through a landscape, although my own voice and perspective have been central to the development of the argument. I have also, both as moral agent and ethicist, needed to *articulate* this process of hermeneutic detours. I have attempted to do so throughout the thesis. Thus, in making transparent my perspective in an interpretative, unfinalizable dialogue with Ricoeur, Bakhtin, Murdoch the philosopher, Murdoch the novelist, Tallis, Julius, Morgan and the others, there are public theoretical points to be made concerning the search for, and attestation of, what is morally authoritative. In the apprehension of the real plurality of perspectives, the continuous ethical dialogue between moral voices can and must continue. Authority has its source in the hermeneutic tension between different, sometimes incommensurable, perspectives: a voice and another, form and content, the universal and the particular, 'idem' and 'ipse', selfhood and action, sameness and difference, self and other and so forth.

Finally, I return to the formulation of the problem: What makes us convinced as to what is truly good and evil, and what gives us the motivation to live (act) in accordance to such conviction? A relational understanding of selfhood and reality has been the centre around which my argument revolves. The formulation of a conclusion has at its heart the insight that I am because you are. You are because I am. On this basis, moral concepts such as 'good' and 'evil' are convincing insofar that they carry internal, relational and substantial authority. Such authoritative content of moral language is significant to the discernment of what it can mean to live a good life "with and for others". And it is in this we can be empowered and motivated with regard to life and action. Ultimately, seeking the authoritative potential of moral language and character is, rather than a question of securing moral knowledge, a quest for moral wisdom.

PART VI: Towards A Theological Dialogue

15. Theology, Moral Voices and Ethical Dialogue

I have throughout the thesis provided several lines of argument towards answering the first two of the three operative questions. In the wake of this, I can now return to the theologian's quest, namely that which concerns theological interpretations of morality and moral concepts. The question I asked, was: *In what way can conceptualizations of God and God's will for creation be interpreted as correlative to the dialogic view on moral authority and agency which has been developed through the study of literary text?* In these final pages of the thesis I shall concern myself with this question. After having been introduced in Part I, the theological voice (its intention and perspective) has been silenced by me in order to hear better some voices that might have something important to tell a theologian who, in fact, wishes to convince the academia and the world that theology can be important. The theological voice has nevertheless been present throughout the dialogue. Sometimes it has been permitted to say a little, but for the most of the time it has had to be quiet. Now, in Part VI, I will raise my theological voice.

Jeffrey Stout, who is not himself a theologian, says that "Academic theology seems to have lost its voice, its ability to command attention as a distinctive contributor to public discourse in our culture."³⁵⁶ He continues to argue that theologians either raise their voices in an internal discussion which is regarded as irrelevant to any person outside the particular religious community, or that they enter a public discourse but leave their theological voice behind in their futile attempt to be heard. Either way, they have little of significance to contribute with. I believe it is characteristic of a situation in which the problem of authority is at stake: theologians are finding it difficult to enter the conversations of a pluralistic society precisely because so many lack the voice of authority that has communicative and persuasive potential. I believe the problem can be articulated in much the same way as the problems of why moral authority is difficult to achieve in contemporary culture: the desired authority is interpreted in terms of a hierarchy rather than a network. There are many different alternatives as to who or what is placed at the "top" of the pyramid. In other words, there are many contesters for the throne in the fight over the source for theological (both religious and moral) authority: God (in more or less sophisticated versions concerning how God or God's will is accessible to humanity),

³⁵⁶ Stout: *Ethics After Babel*, p.163.

Creation (universal humanity), The Christian Community (the narrative of the Church), Piety (the subjective experience of, for instance, the Spirit) and so forth. All such attempts are, what can by now be identified as monologic, external discourse. Such authority has little persuasive power if it is imposed onto human experience instead of entering into dialogue with it. In order for the theological voices to be heard by people such as Stout, they must represent an internal authority, an authority which is communicated in character, and whose substantial content is seen as relationally and dialogically constructed in an unfinalizable quest for what can convincingly held to be true.

I cannot transcend my embeddedness in a particular culture and personal history. But I can and must nevertheless let myself and my perspective become destabilized and challenged through letting other voices enter my internal dialogue. One such ‘other’ is, theologically speaking, God. However, as I pointed out in the introduction, we have no direct access to God. The quest to identify the will of God for creation is a necessary task, but a task which, I said, the theologian must attend to in a way in which does not violate the boundaries for what human beings can interpret within given contexts. Nor must the “will of God” be reduced to what is good for humanity. James Gustafson speaks of the necessity of a theocentric ethics in order for the otherness and externality of God to be truly acknowledged.³⁵⁷ That ethics is ‘theocentric’ as opposed to ‘anthropocentric’, means that God is understood as an objective, external other. This otherness is, according to Gustafson, a condition for understanding that theology cannot be “about God”. Theology is about interpreting what human experience of God is and can be. In other words, a theologian who attends to what he or she believes to be an externally provided and authoritative truth about God, God becomes “created in the image of humanity” and is no longer ‘other’ to human experience.

There is and must be an incommensurable difference between God and creation. This corresponds to a true, dynamic relationality in the sense of which I have developed throughout the thesis. The relation between God and creation is fundamental to the Christian life, and it is therefore a task for the theologian to seek ways of understanding and speaking about this relation. In order to relate to God truly as a gift and not something we already have and know, it is necessary to see theological reflection as a dialogic task. The experience of God as gift, as something we receive, does not reduce God to being made in the image of humanity, but respected and treated as a true ‘other’.

³⁵⁷ This is the central argument in the book Gustafson: *Theocentric Ethics*. See for instance p.112-113.

Gustafson's theocentrism, an understanding of God as radically different to creation, of God as being *beyond* conceptualization can, therefore, correspond well to the dialogic and relational sense of authority which I have developed: in order for a truth to be regarded as substantially authoritative and to provide persuasive power to act, it needs to enter the dialogue in order for it to be challenged or attested to. Thus, the authority with which the Christian speaks must be an authority based on an the internal Christian character's dialogue with the experience of God as 'other'. The radical difference between God and humanity must therefore be upheld, and the authority placed in the network of meaning which belongs to an interpretation of humanity as being relationally conditioned. God as authority for ethics cannot, therefore, be understood in terms of external authority. It is only insofar that the Christian individual lets him or herself enter into a dialogue with God as external "voice", a dialogue that destabilizes and challenges one's given perspective, that one can speak *theologically* of moral authority.

For Stout, and many others who do not believe in God, arguments in which God is called on as the authoritative source, will not be sufficiently convincing no matter how much the theologian attempts to argue by help of a secular language that the reasons are rational. He says, however, that "If we want to understand our fellow citizens (...) we had better develop the means for understanding their moral languages, including the theological ones"³⁵⁸. For a theologian, the implication of this applaudable intention, is first: that the theologian too must attempt to learn other moral languages. This does not mean that one must discard one's own language (there is no either or), but involves an awareness that not all languages are communicable in the form that they have. Secondly, the task for the theologian is to enter into dialogues in which his or her voice can be heard and gradually understood. I have referred earlier to Stout's insistence that the goal cannot be for all to speak moral Esperanto, but that Creole languages can be developed. Languages are dynamic, not static, but change is slow. The quest for moral wisdom is never ending. The quest for moral wisdom itself is, however, what is important.

The two tasks for the theologian – to learn other languages and to let oneself be understood – are intertwined. The precondition is, of course, that the theologian actually enters a conversation. It is in this that the search for what can reasonably be held to be morally authoritative begins. The quest is unfinalizable. There are no simple answers. But the conversation breaks down if partners in dialogue start arguing. The result would be (and often is) a movement to-

³⁵⁸ Stout: *Ethics After Babel*, p.188.

wards disintegration. This can easily happen if differences are understood in terms of dichotomies which must be overcome in order to prevent fragmentation rather than learning to grapple with the tension as the “place” where internal moral and theological authority can develop.

Therefore, the metaphors of dialogue versus monologic discourse are helpful to a theologian who wishes to communicate what truths he or she is convinced by. There is little hope that external authority will persuade a soul. Having a voice is important. It is, however, first when this voice is internally, relationally, and substantially conditioned that it has authority. And such authority is developed in a dialogic attitude: a willingness to let one’s own truths be challenged as well as attested to. Taking the cue from the analysis of Simon in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*: to raise one’s voice is a sign of empowerment. To have no voice is not to be truly humble, it is to be submissive and anxious. To bellow at the top of one’s voice, on the other hand, is not to be authoritative: it is authoritarian misuse of power. Both strategies are fallacies, for none are truly dialogical or relational. It is only on the basis of the never ending conversation between different voices that either of them can become truly authoritative. Dialogue does not mean that one cannot hold one thing or the other to be convincing, persuasive and authoritative with respect to one’s moral life. One can, and it is necessary. What it means is that moral authority belongs to a language of moral wisdom – not moral knowledge.

Voices are flawed and we are fragile. The quest for moral wisdom is a quest for wholeness (not unity). It involves a difficult moral pilgrimage seeking integration (not coherence) of language and action, experience and reflection, the private and the public, the self and the other, the universal and the particular, and – theologically speaking, this moral pilgrimage, the quest for a truly relational selfhood and identity, is to be interpreted in the light of the incommensurable difference between God and creation.

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