

SEEING REALITY IN LIGHT OF LOVE

AN ANALYSIS OF MURDOCHIAN LOVE

HAZEL QING ZHAO

§ 1: INTRODUCTION

In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch proposes that love be rendered as a central concept in morality. True love, she repeatedly claims, involves attending to the *reality* of one's beloved. This connection between love and reality is illustrated in the famous example of the mother-in-law (M) and daughter-in-law (D). M initially holds an unfavourable view of D, seeing her as “vulgar,” “rude,” and “juvenile,” but later realises that this negative perception was driven primarily by her own jealousy.¹ Consequently, M reassesses D's personality, which eventually allows her to see D in a positive light: D is “not vulgar but refreshingly simple,” “not undignified but spontaneous,” “not juvenile but delightfully youthful.”² Crucially, M's reappraisal of D, now purged of jealousy, is said to be a more realistic view enabled by love: “When M is just and loving she sees D as she really is.”³ It is a “...loving gaze directed upon” D's “individual reality,” a gaze that uncovers the truth of D's character.⁴

However, things are not quite simple. Whilst the paradigmatic view in *The Sovereignty of Good* seems to be that “Love” and “Real” are “closely connected” concepts,⁵ the ambiguity involved in Murdoch's

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.

² Murdoch, 17.

³ Murdoch, 36.

⁴ Murdoch, 33.

⁵ Murdoch, 41.

characterization of love has prompted various interpretations. In this paper, I begin by unpacking this ambiguity, showing that Murdoch leaves the relationship between love and reality unclear. Then, I propose that this ambiguity allows for two possible kinds of interpretations of her view on love: the objective view, and the positive light view. Finally, I argue that the positive light view offers a better interpretation of Murdoch's position, concluding that love, while rooted in reality, also exceeds it and transcends it.

§ 2: THE AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE AND REALITY

To illustrate in more detail the relationship between love and reality, I will start with a closer analysis of the mother-in-law example. Consider M's distortion of D's reality by inappropriately describing her as "vulgar," "rude," and "juvenile." This distortion was motivated by jealousy, which is, crucially, an emotion derived from the human *ego*. "The fat, relentless ego," ever-present in human consciousness, seeks naturally to protect its high status, causing one to appropriate another person's reality to fit with one's own wishes.⁶ Indeed, given that jealousy is incompatible with moral righteousness, M's distortion of D's reality is depicted as an instance of seeking to protect her ego by retaining a deluded conception of herself as a morally acceptable person. Given that the ego is always alert to the threats against its own importance, it is not hard to see that it blocks the way of love, which requires other-centeredness. Love comes forward when self-importance is subdued, giving way to a humble recognition of one's own flaws - "I may be prejudiced," "I am certainly jealous"⁷ - M admits to herself, subsequently altering her view to "see D" more "loving(ly)."⁸ In love, M no longer appropriates D's reality to elevate her ego. Love takes M out of selfish concerns that once motivated a distortion of who D is, enabling M to learn about D's independent, individual reality. The process through which M comes to suppress her ego for a clearer vision of D is termed "unselfing."⁹ Love emerges only in an unselfed state.

In short, love enables M to see D "as she really is."¹⁰ M's perception of D is now made more accurate and clear. As Murdoch

⁶ Murdoch, 51.

⁷ Murdoch, 17.

⁸ Murdoch, 36.

⁹ Murdoch, 82.

¹⁰ Murdoch, 36.

puts it, a “refined and honest perception of what is really the case” is the outcome of unselfing.¹¹ Genuine love for another person is the background condition that enables unselfing, and hence, enables the improved perception that is more truthful. If we accept the analysis presented so far, we should conclude that love *grounds*, and, is a *precondition* for a clear perception of reality. However, through a closer reading, I will show that the relationship between love and reality is a lot more ambiguous. This is due to Murdoch’s somewhat unsystematic characterization of love. At times, rather than expressing that love *grounds* the perception of reality, she argues that love itself *is* the perception of reality:

- “Love is knowledge of the individual... Love... is the discovery of reality.”¹²

- “The direction of attention is... outward, away from self... towards the great surprising variety of the world, and the ability to direct attention is love.”¹³

At other points, Murdoch seems to see love as neither identical to the perception of reality, nor a precondition that grounds it. Rather, love is characterised as involving but *exceeding* a mere perception of reality. Whilst love and the vision of the real are both in place, love yields a new power that enriches what we see with emotional depths:

- “What M is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly or lovingly.”¹⁴

- “...what looks like mere accuracy at one end looks more like... love at the other.”¹⁵

In engagement with Murdoch’s works, it is not uncommon for readers to feel that she “does not present systematic, clear arguments”, and to feel “somewhat mystified” as a result.¹⁶ This ambiguity could be conceived of as a pitfall in Murdoch’s writing, yet I suggest that simultaneously, it opens room for critical reflection upon the relationship between love and the perception of reality. In what follows, I will begin by outlining the two dominant interpretations that seek to clarify this relationship: the objective view and the positive light view. Then, I argue that the positive light view offers a better account of love.

¹¹ Murdoch, 37.

¹² Murdoch, 27.

¹³ Murdoch, 65.

¹⁴ Murdoch, 22.

¹⁵ Murdoch, 87.

¹⁶ Heather Widdows, *The moral vision of Iris Murdoch* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 11.

§ 3. LOVE: THE OBJECTIVE VIEW V.S. THE POSITIVE LIGHT VIEW

On the objective view, to love someone is to confront the full reality of who they are in a detailed and objective manner. Wolf endorses the objective view as an interpretation of Murdoch, proposing that true love requires loving “unreservedly despite the full awareness of faults in the objects of... [one’s]... love.”¹⁷ The objective view can accommodate two ways of understanding love. First, it is compatible with the claim that love itself *is* the perception of reality. The person capable of careful, objective attention to the details and nuances of reality embodies love. This is to say that when M manifests love by virtue of the fact that she attends to the reality of who D objectively is, she sees D clearly and accurately, and to see D this way *is* to love D. Alternatively, the objective view is compatible with viewing love as a *precondition* that *grounds* the perception of reality; that is to say, attention to reality can only happen when love is present. There cannot “be such a thing as careful attention — which aims to see its object clearly, accurately, objectively — in the absence of love.”¹⁸ Or, as Mason writes, “... love has an irreducible epistemic role... reality is... perceptible only to the person who lovingly attends to it.”¹⁹ Love sets up the background within which objective vision of reality takes place.

The positive light view of love stands in contrast to the objective view. In this view, love involves attending to another person but does not necessitate full confrontation with the *entirety* of their objective, present reality. Whilst a sufficient level of objectivity is still in place to enable genuine receptivity towards the beloved’s reality, it allows that the lover’s vision of their beloved is overall more positive than strictly objective, seeing their beloved as promising more than they currently are. This involves, as Driver puts, “[overlooking] at least minor flaws” in the object of one’s love.²⁰

¹⁷ Susan Wolf, “Loving Attention: Lessons in Love from The Philadelphia Story,” in *Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, and Fiction*, ed. Susan Wolf and Christopher Grau (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2014), 169, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195384512.003.0017>.

¹⁸ Wolf, 174.

¹⁹ Cathy Mason, “Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love,” in *New Philosophical Essays on Love and Loving*, ed. Simon Cushing (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 10.

²⁰ Julia Driver, “Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 87 (2020): 177.

Whilst we might debate about what kind of flaws count as “minor” (which will set a limit on the permissiveness of a loving gaze), as far as some flaws are overlooked, the small element of idealisation involved here nevertheless means that love is neither identical to nor a mere precondition to the perception of the real. The positive light view, whilst certainly not blind to reality, is compatible with the view that love involves but *exceeds* reality.

It should be emphasised that both the objective view and the positive light view understand love as requiring attending to the objective, present reality of the beloved in some way. However, they indeed demand different *kinds* of attention to the reality in question. The objective view of love involves attending to reality accurately, objectively, and in a detailed manner; love is either this detailed perception itself or a necessary means to achieve detailed perception. One sees relatively accurately their beloved’s strengths and weaknesses, and the amount of joy or pain they experience. With an objective understanding of their beloved, they love their beloved as they are. The positive light view of love, by contrast, is not as rigorous about objectivity or accuracy *per se*. It still requires one to be attentive enough towards the beloved’s experience to “share their contexts,”²¹ which enables seeing a comprehensive picture of them. However, the picture seen here is less ‘as it is’ than the picture seen from the objective view — it speaks to a more general, universalising impression, while leaving room for appropriate imaginary content regarding future potentials. Think of the helpful example given by Driver, where parents might be moved by love to see their child as a more talented artist than he objectively is at present.²² For, rather than dismissing the child’s doodles as some incomprehensible abstractions, love enables the parents to pick up subtle signs, and see in the child the potential for artistic growth. Similarly, we have reasons to think that a mother can be said to love her child even prior to the child’s birth, even though she has not yet attained much knowledge of what the child is like.²³

At first glance, we may be inclined to say that the positive light view digresses from the paradigmatic view in SOG. After all, one could argue that in claiming M sees D “not just accurately but lovingly,” the contrast here between love and the real nevertheless supposes that M sees D *both* lovingly and realistically. As Robjant

²¹ Driver, 172.

²² Driver, 177.

²³ Christopher Cordner, “Love,” in *The Murdochian Mind*, ed. Silvia Panizza and Mark Hopwood (London: Routledge, 2022), 175.

puts it, “M before D confronts a reality.”²⁴ The liberation from the ego is conceived of as the path towards an increasingly clear, true, and accurate vision of the current state of the world, things, and other people. The positive light view, however, regards love as presenting an overriding force in informing M’s vision of D, allowing her to attain a renewed interpretation that recognises the positive potential in D - pleasantly “simple,” “spontaneous,” and “youthful.” If we accept this, it follows that it may be hard to tell whether M’s loving vision of D is the most accurate and realistic reflection of who D currently is. Perhaps “impartial observers” who feel no particular love towards D may not share M’s vision of D; they might, instead, “agree with M’s earlier vision, seeing D as vulgar, juvenile, and so on.”²⁵ Why should we think that love must be something *more than* this perception of the real?

§ 4: JUSTIFICATION FOR THE POSITIVE LIGHT VIEW

Before I present my analysis, I shall briefly reformulate the three ways of understanding Murdoch’s characterization of the relationship between love and accurate perception of reality:

- (1) Love itself *is* the accurate perception of the reality of the beloved;
- (2) Love *grounds*, and, is a *precondition* for the perception of the reality of the beloved;
- (3) Love involves but *exceeds* the perception of the reality of the beloved.

Perhaps one is tempted to say that, in SOG, Murdoch overall leans towards the objective view of love - “Real” and “Love” are “closely connected.”²⁶ The objective view presents an ideal picture which grants both love and accurate perception of the present state of the beloved. This view is compatible with both (1) and (2). Upon further

²⁴ David Robjant, “Is Iris Murdoch a Closet Existentialist? Some Trouble with Vision, Choice and Exegesis,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2013): 483.

²⁵ Paul Katsafanas, “Depth, Articulacy, and the Ego: Murdoch on Moral Vision,” in *Iris Murdoch’s The Sovereignty of Good*, ed. Carla Bagnoli and Bradford Cokelet, Anniversaries Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

²⁶ Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 41.

examination, however, I argue that (1) lacks plausibility. Namely, love cannot be wholly identical with accurate vision - it needs to be something more. As Cordner argues, mere accuracy of vision is insufficient for love. Accurate vision without the right orientation can easily corrupt into a cold, “acute eye for others’ weaknesses”, where the “aim” is to “exploit them” for one’s own gain.²⁷ It is, therefore, hard to see why accuracy and objectivity *per se* entail love.

However, didn’t Murdoch, through the mother and daughter-in-law example, demonstrate that accurate vision is attainable only to those who are *already* unselfed (i.e. taken out of self-concern)? Shouldn’t this lead us to think that a selfish and manipulative person cannot even achieve accuracy of vision in the first place? I argue we have reasons not to think so. It is vital to note that unselfing as a criterion to enable accurate perception “is mostly a negative one.”²⁸ As Murdoch herself concedes, the ego is inherent to and ever-present in the human consciousness; its forces are impossible to fully counteract.²⁹ As long as we remain alive, the ego will continue posing selfish forces, yielding jealousy, resentment, and pride that blots out our vision of the real. Understood this way, we could conclude that one’s vision can lean more towards being unselfed than egocentric, but not that it can be entirely unselfed. As such, what is shown here is merely that unselfing is good for improving the accuracy of vision. Since absolutely unselfed, accurate vision is already a rejected possibility in Murdoch’s understanding, it follows that all vision can only attain relative accuracy, and there is no reason to think that relatively accurate vision is only attainable by someone who has unselfed. With this in mind, we are now in a position to believe that selfish people who aim to exploit others are just as capable of a relatively accurate vision of another person’s reality. After all, an objective perception of others’ motives, fears and weaknesses is essential for deploying them for one’s own purpose. Selfish people might even see accurately the strengths and goodness in another person, yet remain unmoved by what they see. (1) cannot be the most plausible, because accurate, truthful vision itself does not necessarily involve a loving attitude.

(2) can be ruled out on similar grounds. Namely, given that there can be unloving forms of accurate perception, it means that accurate

²⁷ Christopher Cordner, “Lessons of Murdochian Attention,” *Sophia* 55, no. 2 (2016): 201.

²⁸ Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, “Perception, Self, and Zen: On Iris Murdoch and the Taming of Simone Weil,” *Philosophies* 8, no. 4 (2023): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies8040064>.

²⁹ Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 53.

perception does not necessarily require love as a precondition. Since both (1) and (2) have been rejected, the objective view has not found justification. Love, then, is more plausibly understood as involving but exceeding the clear perception of reality. The objection to (2) shows us that love cannot ground an accurate perception of one's beloved. However, this does not threaten the fact that love could still involve accurate vision. Love certainly inspires in us a curiosity towards, and a desire for knowledge of, our beloved, which in turn leads us to become more attentive to their reality. As Cordner puts it, love involves an openness and receptiveness towards one's beloved.³⁰ It is natural for one to, through love, gain clearer knowledge of what their beloved is like, and be moved to attend to their needs. Accurate vision does not entail love, but love nevertheless motivates one to see *increasingly* the reality of another person: the lover discerns the subtle sadness of his beloved when no one else notices; the sister knows that her younger brother is struggling even though he did not ask for help.

Love, then, is at least compatible with seeing a version of our beloved that is increasingly real. But the sense in which it is real is quite nuanced, because we still have good reasons to question how objective and accurate this love-inspired vision can be. Namely, given that the "unself" - the state in which love emerges - is an ongoing process towards an ideal that is never fully achievable, the extent of accuracy will remain limited. And, we could take our skepticism even further. We might think that love does not really result in more accurate or objective vision. In a sense, it is hard to pinpoint whether a loving vision is accurate enough, given that we, as human beings, exist as independent entities who will never fully understand each other. Indeed, Piety argues that in the mother-in-law example, the only source of objective knowledge has been D's unaltered behaviour.³¹ Even when M became more unselfed and attentive, she was still attaching *interpretations* to D's behaviour which cannot count strictly as objective knowledge. Consequently, M's reappraisal of D serves to reveal not something about D, but something about M herself — "that is, that she was loving."³² Moran expresses similar views. He thinks that M's later favourable description of D merely shows a change in M's personal orientation rather than an increase in M's accuracy of

³⁰ Cordner, "Lessons of Murdochian Attention," 211.

³¹ Marilyn Gaye Piety, "Kierkegaard and Murdoch on Knowledge of the Good," in *Why Kierkegaard Matters: A Festschrift in Honor of Robert L. Perkins*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, Mary Amanda Jolley, and Edward L. Rowell (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010), 210-11.

³² Piety, 213.

vision.³³ Both Piety and Moran think that whilst M's loving vision of D is unselfed, attentive, and receptive towards D's reality, there can be no certainty as to whether the reality of D perceived by M is accurate and objective.

Given these doubts, should we altogether reject the view that love can lead to a clearer perception of the beloved's reality? I suggest we need not. Building on Cordner's account of love as a receptivity towards the beloved, I propose that, through love, one is receptive towards not just a factual reality, but also a felt, phenomenal reality. When we love someone, they become more *real* to us in that they become more *significant* to us. This perceived significance diminishes our sense of self-importance, and moves us to desire what is good for our beloved for their own sake. The beloved is made more real to us, for, in our loving gaze, their needs appear with more urgency, their joy and sorrow more noticeable, and their entire being precious and irreplaceable. This is what I mean by a receptivity towards the felt reality of our beloved. Seeing the beloved in this way does not require a complete adherence to absolute factual knowledge about the beloved. For, as previously mentioned, loving vision is compatible with overlooking minor flaws, and recognising potential for betterment that is yet to be actualised. It is precisely this type of love that adequately explains cases where parents lovingly discern the artistic talents of their child, or care about their newborn tenderly, without yet knowing what kind of person they will become. As such, in viewing our beloved as significant in this manner, our love is rooted in reality yet exceeds and transcends it, because we see through them to the inherent preciousness and value they instantiate, where this preciousness is not tied wholly to factual knowledge.

This, I argue, is the way the positive light view is to be justified. Loving vision involves but surpasses the real, because the experience of love is fundamentally *personal*. As Murdoch herself proposes, the reality of any object or person is "infinitely to be learned, as an individual object of love... a painter might say, 'you don't know what 'red' means',"³⁴ because she has developed a unique vision of red that no one else can fully share. Or again, "the movement of understanding is onward into increasing privacy... and not back towards a genesis in the rulings of an impersonal public language."³⁵ In one's vision of reality, the element of the personal is inevitable. A love-inspired vision

³³ Richard Moran, "Iris Murdoch and Existentialism," in *The Philosophical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 190.

³⁴ Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 29.

³⁵ Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 28.

is a particular vision rather than a universal one. As Cordner beautifully puts it: “it is *John’s* smile she loves... not ‘a’ smile that... happens to be attached to John... she finds John *presenced-in* his smile.”³⁶ Thus, we are not seeing more clearly in the sense of gathering ever-more-detailed and accurate information about our beloved. Instead, love opens a space for the real by making the felt reality of our beloved more significant to us. Simultaneously, the profoundly personal nature of love takes us to see the beloved as embodying an inherent goodness that reaches deeper than the apparent qualities they possess. What is primary here is a knowledge ‘of’ the ontological importance of the beloved and not a knowledge ‘about’ them, although the latter may well be a spillover effect of the former, because love motivates a curiosity in the lover to learn more about the beloved. This is the way in which love involves, but also exceeds, the perception of the real. To put it more precisely, love involves perceiving a certain level of the beloved’s objective reality, but exceeds it by entering a more phenomenal, personal realm where their inherent preciousness comes to light.

However, a further objection may be raised here. Specifically, the arguments above express that, while love is directed towards a beloved who exists with a factual, objective reality, the lover’s vision is based more in a phenomenal, felt reality of the beloved. If this is true, the aforementioned skeptical challenge appears unresolved. For, given that the phenomenal reality takes precedence, one might worry that this love does not involve sufficient objectivity at all. Basing our love upon certain current facts about the beloved seems required to warrant that it is towards them, rather than someone else, that we direct our love. If no sufficient objectivity is involved, we will be loving a mere illusion of the beloved that deviates from their actuality, which would also count as an egotistical distortion that Murdoch herself criticises. If the positive light view of love is to be better justified, then, it is not enough that one has access to the phenomenal reality of the beloved, referring to mere potentials within or the overall significance of them. Rather, it must be demonstrated that an appropriately objective foundation remains established in the background, because objectivity is crucial for warranting that the beloved individual is the true object of our love.

In defence of my account, I argue that the objective foundation required is still in place even if we accept the positive light view. Namely, the worry is that perceiving a felt reality might miss the kind of objectivity to ensure that our love is directed at a real, particular

³⁶ Cordner, “Love,” 175.

person rather than an illusion or fantasy. But I think a loving vision that perceives an overall significance and positive potential still has a firm basis in the objective reality, although such objectivity is limited due to various factors, such as the impossibility of fully unselfing, and the general difficulty in deriving accurate interpretations of other people who are not ourselves. To illustrate this point more clearly, recall the examples I have provided above. When the parents see promise in the child's scribbles, they are inferring the child's talents based on a concrete piece of drawing. There is no illusion in the sense that the parents see a talent with no basis in objective reality. It is just that love informs their vision to make the talent more noticeable.

The same applies to my example of perceiving the feelings of the beloved. Before I proceed with this, an understanding of Blum's account of responsiveness will be useful. Blum comments that, in Murdoch's view, "knowing" another person involves a responsiveness, where one allows "the perception of another person's distress to affect oneself."³⁷ However, he follows this up by noting that "experiencing the *same* feeling as the other person is neither necessary nor sufficient for responsiveness."³⁸ It is not sufficient, because having the same feeling does not entail altruistic concerns for the suffering person. Nor is it necessary, because one can have deep and loving care towards the suffering other without sharing the same emotional experiences. When I argue that the beloved's suffering becomes more urgent or noticeable in the lover's view, I mean it not in an illusory sense where the lover has made an epistemic error. The lover is still responding to the beloved's actual states of suffering at a particular point, which is grounded in objective reality. What I propose is that, because having the exact *same* painful feelings as our beloved is unlikely, love may heighten our perception of their painful feelings as more urgent on a phenomenal level. A perceived urgency is still far from an epistemic error. And the outcome of this perception is still warranted, because it is the loving responsiveness to the beloved's actual states of suffering.

§ 5: CONCLUSION

Overall, my view is that a loving vision is layered, with objectivity present within but not exhaustive of it. One might think that the positive light view I defend departs from Murdoch's paradigmatic

³⁷ Lawrence A. Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190, emphasis added.

³⁸ Blum, 190.

view, which is that love enables us to see the beloved reality as it is. However, given that Murdoch thinks that love in a state of absolute “unself” is an ideal end point that is humanly impossible, and that only such a state allows for a true perception of reality, it follows that love can, at best, perceive what is relatively real. And this, perhaps, is why Murdoch also refrains from endorsing a universalised, singular vision. When she writes that “the movement of understanding is onward into increasing privacy... and not back towards a genesis in the rulings of an impersonal public language,”³⁹ she acknowledges the necessary subjectivity inherent in our vision. It could be argued, therefore, that the positive light view may be more consistent with Murdoch’s philosophical framework than it initially appears.

In ordinary life, we would think that loving someone does not guarantee an accurate and objective vision of them. There is, of course, no harm in loving someone whilst seeing them accurately, fully and in a detailed manner. Yet, my arguments thus far should offer at least some reasons to think that love need not satisfy this condition to count as good love. Before we end, it may be illuminating to draw on Murdoch’s novel to offer final support for the positive light view. While Murdoch did stress that “her novels should not be seen as... theoretical arguments for a position,” she does acknowledge that “the novel is itself an ethical form,” which should warrant reference to it for further insights into moral matters.⁴⁰

In Murdoch’s novel *The Black Prince*, the protagonist, Bradley, falls in love with a girl named Julian.⁴¹ While his love for Julian has made him more attentive and less selfish, it has also brought him to perceive something more in Julian that is not entirely obvious to other people. The ordinary and oftentimes immature young girl that everyone takes Julian to be becomes so wonderful and precious in Bradley’s loving gaze. Although this vision may not be free from some level of idealisation, it is undoubtedly loving. In fact, if we take actions to be indications of love, we could even argue that Bradley loves Julian too much. As Nussbaum notes, the intensity of Bradley’s love led him to a courageous sacrifice “clearly for Julian’s sake” and “extreme in its consequences”⁴² - he conceals the fact that Julian’s mother was the true murderer of her father by taking the blame himself, which results in his jail sentence.

³⁹ Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 28.

⁴⁰ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Faint with Secret Knowledge’: Love and Vision in Murdoch’s *The Black Prince*,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 692.

⁴¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

⁴² Nussbaum, “Faint with Secret Knowledge,” 703.

The novel, as I interpret it, supports the positive light view that love arises from objective reality, but transcends it at the level of subjective experience. It enables us to perceive the beloved's inherent value as a unique individual, a value that lies beyond mere factual knowledge. Even though Bradley appears to miss certain factual details about Julian, the intensity of his love is evident through his responsiveness towards her. Through love, Bradley achieves a heightened awareness of Julian's needs and feelings. This is evident in his decision to conceal the truth of the murder, which was driven by his belief that revealing it would cause Julian significant emotional pain. Both the acknowledgement of Julian's inherent value and the responsiveness towards Julian's potential agony point towards the positive light view of love. The time when Julian questions that Bradley does not see her clearly,⁴³ what she has in mind is perhaps more akin to a complete factual understanding of her personality. But love takes precedence over such facts. Beyond an infinite collection of facts, Bradley loves Julian because she *is*.

⁴³ Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 265.

REFERENCES

- Blum, Lawrence A. *Moral perception and particularity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cordner, Christopher. "Lessons of Murdochian Attention." *Sophia* 55, no. 2 (2016): 197-213.
- Cordner, Christopher. "Love." In *The Murdochian Mind*, edited by Silvia Caprioglio Panizza and Mark Hopwood, 169-82. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Driver, Julia. "Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 87 (2020): 169-180.
- Katsafanas, Paul. "Depth, articulacy, and the ego: Murdoch on moral vision." In *Iris Murdoch's Sovereignty of Good*, edited by Carla Bagnoli and Brad Cokelet. Anniversaries Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2025.
- Mason, Cathy. "Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love." In *New Philosophical Essays on Love and Loving*, edited by Simon Cushing, 39-62. Cham: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2021.
- Moran, Richard. "Iris Murdoch and Existentialism." In *The Philosophical Imagination*, 185-204. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Black Prince*. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "'Faint with Secret Knowledge': Love and Vision in Murdoch's *The Black Prince*." *Poetics today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 689-710.
- Panizza, Silvia Caprioglio. "Perception, Self, and Zen: On Iris Murdoch and the Taming of Simone Weil." *Philosophies* 8, no. 4 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies8040064>.
- Piety, Marilyn Gaye. "Kierkegaard and Murdoch on Knowledge of the Good." In *Why Kierkegaard Matters: A Festschrift in Honor of Robert L. Perkins*, edited by Robert L. Perkins, Mary Amanda Jolley, and Edward L. Rowell, 204-14. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010.
- Robjant, David. "Is Iris Murdoch a Closet Existentialist? Some Trouble with Vision, Choice and Exegesis." *European Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2013): 475-94.
- Widdows, Heather. *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005.
- Wolf, Susan. "Loving Attention: Lessons in Love from The Philadelphia Story." In *Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, and Fiction*, edited by Susan Wolf and Christopher Grau. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195384512.003.0017>.