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## Loving Gaze and Accurate Knowledge\*

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### ABSTRACT

Frequently, philosophers use examples to make their ideas clearer to readers. Later, commentators take these examples and go beyond the philosophers' original intentions. This doubtless occurs because the example is so well-chosen that it prompts questions or problems that did not concern the example's originator at the time. While the example may serve its original context well, however, it cannot respond to questions for which it was not devised. This is the case with the famous example of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law offered by Iris Murdoch as evidence that it is possible to speak of morality even when the transformations of a subject only affect the subject's inner life. Because Murdoch's example is so rich, it has served as the starting point for other analyses that address the mother-in-law's motives and the transformation process she undergoes as her view of the daughter-in-law changes. That is the case with the present paper, which sets out to analyse the relationship between painstakingly acquired knowledge of the reality of the other and the loving gaze (LG). Basing my analysis on Murdoch's example, I will apply my conclusions to an interpretation of the mother-in-law's transformation process. In this process of inner transformation, virtue is understood as "(...) a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness"<sup>1</sup>, and it appears to be a key element in explaining her change. However, the question that must be asked is whether virtue is the cause behind the transformation of her view of reality or, rather, when her view undergoes change, she then enters into the realm of virtue. In other words, does virtue give rise to LG or does LG lead to virtue?

**Keywords:** Iris Murdoch, loving gaze, knowledge, virtue, attention

1 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 91.



## Introduction

Murdoch puts the example of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the following terms:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is very 'correct' person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way (...) the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as *happening* happens entirely in M's mind.

Thus much for M's first thoughts about D. Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned (...) by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: 'I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.' Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. (...) The change is not in D's behaviour but in M's mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on.<sup>1,2</sup>

What Murdoch's example shows is that:

- a) M has a negative idea of D that she does not show in her behaviour or manner.
- b) Because M is an 'intelligent and well-intentioned' person, 'capable of self-criticism' and 'capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her', she tells herself that she might be narrow-minded or old-fashioned.
- c) She concludes: 'Let me look again' perhaps because of:
  1. A sense of justice
  2. An intention to love D
  3. Her love for her son
  4. Her reticence to think that her son is foolish or has made a mistake.

1 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 17-18.

2 The italics are the author's.

The example serves Murdoch to defend that “what is happening” in M is of an internal order, is moral and belongs to her, and that the fact that it has no external implications and cannot be observed does not mean that it is of no moral significance.<sup>3</sup>

Building on Murdoch’s example, let me pose two questions:

1. What is the relationship between the knowledge of others, the evaluations of others and what various authors understand by the expression *loving gaze*<sup>4</sup>, which Murdoch uses to convey what she means by the term “attention”, borrowed from S. Weil?<sup>5</sup>
2. What are the possible reasons that move M to reconsider her relationship with D?

These two questions, which do not relate to Murdoch’s purpose in using the example, will be analysed by building on Murdoch’s own philosophical ideas. With respect to the first question, two possibilities arise, while an exposition of the second possibility offers a response to the second question.

### **Question 1: What is the relationship between the knowledge of others, the evaluations of others and the notion of loving gaze?**

Snow, in reference to the Murdoch’s example, says:

A loving gaze is preferable because it would have us base evaluations of persons on facts about them, rather than on the distorted projections of evaluators. The value of loving gaze relies in large part on its accuracy with respect to the facts.<sup>6</sup>

Snow maintains that LG is the base because it focuses us on facts and not on a personal projection of the facts. LG<sup>7</sup> is what enables us to be more accurate with respect to the facts.

One of the more interesting issues posed by analysing the relationship between LG and knowledge of reality is how to determine whether the loving gaze is the result of an accurate knowledge of reality or whether such accurate knowledge of reality requires LG as a precursor.

Therefore, two possibilities exist for the relationship between LG and knowledge of reality:

- a) An accurate consideration of reality leads to LG: knowledge brings about the gaze; or

3 In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch offers a broad examination and critique of Hampshire’s thesis (and the thesis of others), according to which reality is defined by what is open and observable to others. The will appears distinct and separate from thought, feeling or belief; instead, the will involves an identification with the subject. The sphere of morality is this public sphere, not the inner life. This image of humanity is related to Behaviourism (what can be analysed is observable), Existentialism (the suppression of the substantial I and the affirmation of a powerful will), and Utilitarianism (morality resides in the consequences).

4 Swanton and Snow, among others.

5 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 34.

6 Nancy Snow, “Iris Murdoch’s Notion of a Loving Gaze”, *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 39 (2005), 493.

7 I take LG as referring to people or events related to people.

b) LG opens the door to an accurate consideration of reality: the gaze leads to knowledge.

**a) An accurate consideration of reality leads to LG: knowledge brings about the gaze.**

In option (a), the matter could be reformulated in the following way: our knowledge of reality is what determines the kind of gaze we direct at reality. We understand that knowledge can be adequate when it does not project the personal I on known reality, or it can be inadequate if, instead, it does project the personal I on this known reality. Starting from the notion that knowledge precedes the gaze and can be adequate or inadequate, we can see that:

1. Adequate knowledge of reality can bring about:

1.1. Loving Gaze (LG)

1.2. Hostile Gaze (HG)

1.3. Indifferent Gaze (IG)

That is, known reality can awaken a gaze that is loving, hostile or indifferent. Building on this distinction, we can ask two further questions:

a) Given that adequate knowledge of reality supposes putting aside the I in the process of knowing, is it possible to put aside the 'I' at the moment of knowing without having a loving gaze beforehand? In other words, can I know reality as it is without looking at it with LG?

In this case, I would say that since human beings are selfish by nature<sup>8</sup>, it is supposed that knowledge is appropriate because it has been worked, polished, so the LG is already present in one's knowledge.

b) Does an adequate knowledge, which does not project the 'I', necessarily generate LG by putting aside the subjectivity of knowledge? This question can be answered as above.

2. An inadequate knowledge of reality can bring about:

2.4. Loving Gaze

2.5. Hostile Gaze

2.6. Indifferent Gaze

In the second case, deficient knowledge of reality can also awaken a gaze that is loving, hostile or indifferent in nature. However, since an inadequate knowledge of reality is inadequate because it comes from the 'I', it seems more likely to be a hostile or indifferent gaze than a loving one.

8 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 78.

One of the reasons for this is that the hostile or indifferent gaze requires less effort: it is more egotistical. Otherwise, it not seem easy to explain how an interested knowledge can lead to an disinterested gaze, without discarding it entirely, you can hardly say that selfishness goes beyond the boundaries of subjectivity to encourage a gaze in which the other is highlighted.

A possible objection is that a person in love who has an inadequate knowledge of the other, nonetheless, looks on the beloved with a loving gaze (as opposed to a hostile or indifferent gaze, according to the options above). The relationship under consideration, however, is not a romantic relationship between two people, because loving gaze does not refer to the gaze of a lover. Between these two kinds of relationship there are differences of motivation and, especially, of sentiment.

In all of the hypothetical cases in this section, the gaze is an emotional, but not a romantic, reaction that stems from adequate or inadequate knowledge. While the romantic possibility is conceivable, it clearly does not appear in Murdoch's thinking. For Murdoch, vision is not an emotional reaction derived from knowledge; it is not an unintentional, inattentive gaze directed at the other, but rather an intention that is expressly directed at the other and expressed in LG that sees the other as the other really is.

While the Murdoch's reasoning does not that knowledge brings about the gaze, this is clearly a perspective that could be developed. However, it not very rewarding, because it leaves the analysis focused on and I for whom the relationship with reality is secondary<sup>9</sup>.

### **b) LG opens the door to an accurate consideration of reality: the gaze leads to knowledge.**

Option (b) runs contrary to the first hypothesis: LG is the condition for adequate knowledge because it makes it possible to come closer to the other without the interposition of the mediating I. When Murdoch addresses the relationship between the subject and reality, she poses the notion of attention: "I have used the word 'attention' (...) to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality."<sup>10</sup>

In Murdoch's example, two quite different moments can be distinguished: an initial moment in which M is hostile—mentally hostile—to D, and a later moment when D is an object of M's attention. The latter moment is the one that gives M the perspective to appreciate D differently. What is the path that M has covered between the initial and later moments?<sup>11</sup>

The hostility felt by M for D before the change is a feeling that probably arises because M has not analysed D or because she has made a wrong analysis for various reasons (e.g., envy, jealousy,

9 From the perspective of solipsism, one can argue that it is impossible to go beyond oneself and, therefore, that knowing reality is an illusion. However, in the field of praxis, reality cannot be set aside because all action takes place in reality.

10 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 34.

11 "A step is missing from both the analyses of Murdoch and Swanton. The missing step would chart the mother's emotional odyssey from a hostile to a loving gaze." Snow, "Iris Murdoch's Notion of a Loving Gaze", 489.

rivalry); in any case, it is a feeling determined by an inadequate knowledge—mediated by M's I—of D's reality. What reasons could lead someone to question the hostility he or she directs at another person when this hostile gaze is already an established part of his or her daily life? What could bring the hostility into question?

In Murdoch's example, the distance between M and D appears to be an important element. The fact that M does not have regular dealings with D enables M to objectivise D and it encourages M to ask questions about the kind of relationship that exists between the two women. In contrast, the ongoing presence of D would reinforce M's hostility by offering no break for M to reconsider D.

D's absence from M's daily life not only makes possible M's work on her own inner life, but it also temporarily suspends all the stimuli that could reinforce M's animadversion toward D.

What causes the change in M could be any personal experience that has no connection to D. A reflection or reading could trigger a reconsideration of the hostile gaze that one directs at the other: "It is also a psychological fact, and one of importance in moral philosophy, that we can all receive moral help by focusing our attention upon things which are valuable: virtuous people, great art, perhaps (...) the idea of goodness itself."<sup>12</sup> One can suppose that some reading or work of art could have prompted M's reflection on her relationship with D. Murdoch's philosophy may contain sufficient elements to develop the thesis that great art can induce moral reflection with clearly practical effects. This is precisely the case with the practical effects on Dora's life, in the novel *The Bell*, caused by her contemplation of a painting in the National Gallery, *Gainsborough's Two Daughters*<sup>13</sup>, during a period of isolation and withdrawal in her life. This also occurs with the example of the kestrel in flight<sup>14</sup>, which captures our attention and is able momentarily to suspend the self-centred gaze of the person watching it. Whichever the factor that triggers M's change, Snow is correct when saying that the change is not only cognitive, but also emotional.<sup>15</sup>

Leaving aside the question of the driving force behind M's reconsideration of her relationship to D, what is beyond doubt is that the intention to see the other from a fresh perspective must begin with self-criticism and evidence that something is not right, that a discomfort needs to be resolved. One of the reasons enlisted for wishing to reconsider the HG that one directs at another is moral progress;<sup>16</sup> this statement supposes that moral maturity would exclude the hostile gaze in all cases, even when good reasons exist for the other to be looked upon with hostility. In the final analysis, the transformation of oneself is a moral task: "(...) one's task is to transform oneself, to discard selfishness and to undergo a very long process of conversion."<sup>17</sup>

12 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 56.

13 Murdoch, *The Bell*, (London: Vintage, 2004), 190.

14 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 84.

15 Snow, "Iris Murdoch's Notion of a Loving Gaze", 489.

16 Heather Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 40.

17 Gillian Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in The House of Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 108.

LG appears to be a different way of seeing reality and also of seeing oneself. The inner gaze must be prior to reconsideration of what lies outside the I: self-analysis leads to an inner transformation, brought about by reflection, which in turn causes the LG to flourish.

This is the viewpoint of Spinoza<sup>18</sup>, who stated that intellectual love (which we can equate with LG) is the result of knowledge of substance, independently of its specific manifestations or modes. In Spinoza's exposition, LG is the result of an inner transformation that leads to an appreciation of reality from a dimension that transcends reality.

What the I of the other is in reality matters little; the transformation brought about within will always cast an LG upon the other. At the end of the story of the relationship between D and M, M says: "Let me look again". Taking this perspective into account, we could rewrite M's words as "Let me look again inside", because it is not the person of D in need of being considered again, but rather M's relationship with D. Everything that M says to herself to change her perspective toward D makes reference to M's own personality: "I am old fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous." D has not ceased to be as she was before, but she has ceased to be viewed as such by M.

Murdoch says that "M has been active", "M has been morally active"; in reality, M has been morally active because she has devoted herself to breaking down the barriers of the I that impeded how she considered D. Without any external change, M's inner life has undergone an important transformation to the point that she becomes able to look at D and really see her. On this point, Nancy Schaubert sees the active role of the will, which Murdoch considers irrelevant:

What role does the will play in all this? Clearly, it plays a role in the mother's efforts to see differently. It is clear that M has tried to have a different opinion of D, or at least to make certain that her opinion was fair and accurate. (...) There is a tension between Murdoch's official conception of love, which is purely cognitive, and its volitional component present in her example.<sup>19</sup>

What knowledge has changed? In fact, M discovers nothing new about D. What has changed is her way of seeing what is there, of seeing what D is actually like. Now M sees D not as "vulgar" but as "refreshingly simple", not as "undignified" but as "spontaneous, not as "noisy" but as "gay". M has managed to stop looking at D through the models of her own ego and now sees D "with other eyes".

Turning to Murdoch's text, we find that one of the keys to understanding "Let me look again" is the spoken expression of M's transformation; her transformation has already occurred by the time the words are spoken. M shuts her eyes and, when she opens them, is ready to look differently than before. As Murdoch says, what M tries to do *ex hypothesi* is not simply to see D accurately but also to see her justly and lovingly. In other words, there is a prior determination

18 Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000), prop. XXXII.

19 Nancy Schaubert, "Murdoch's Morality: Vision, Will and Rules." *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 35 (2001), 482.



to see the other differently, with a favourable attitude. The LG arises through a desire to see the other justly and lovingly. LG is not a desire itself, but desire is present in it. Snow says that LG is what enables one to see reality accurately, but that it is the result of an inner transformation that is directed at the singularisation of the person of the other, a prior self-convincing to look on the other positively.

If LG enables us to see things accurately, M's remarks about D when she looks upon D with LG serve to translate M's assessment of D. M's words about D are words that translate a clear intention to value her lovingly. In fact, I believe that Murdoch refers specifically to this notion when she says: "What M is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly or lovingly."<sup>20</sup>

LG does not rest on accuracy, but goes beyond accuracy to love: "(...) and the ability so to direct attention is love."<sup>21</sup> Accuracy refers to a gaze directed carefully at the details, a gaze that tries to understand the other, see the singularity of the other justly or lovingly<sup>22</sup>, a gaze stripped of ego.

What kind of love are we really talking about here? According to Schaubert, it is not a romantic kind of love, but one that excludes all emotion: "She has in mind not an emotion, or a relationship, or a romantic conception of love, but a certain kind of acute cognition."<sup>23</sup> Schaubert sees Murdoch's concept of love as something impersonal that involves an exercise of distancing that enables one to see things as they are.<sup>24</sup> For Schaubert, Murdoch's concept is 'purely cognitive'<sup>25</sup> and the identification links to the scant presence of the will in the example of M and D. However, in *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*, when Murdoch discusses love in relation to the Good, love appears in terms that lead us to think of it as a concept that incorporates a relationship that is not solely cognitive:

And when we try perfectly to love what is imperfect our love goes to its object *via* the Good to be thus purified and made unselfish and just. The mother loving the retarded child or loving the tiresome elderly relation. Love is the general name of the quality of attachment and it is capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors; but when it is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good.<sup>26</sup>

Given the above extract, we must suppose that love includes an emotional part that complements the cognitive part or that Murdoch uses more than one concept of love. Indeed, in

20 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 23.

21 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 66.

22 In the example of M and D, Murdoch says 'justly or lovingly' (*The Sovereignty of Good*, 23), but when she defines 'attention' she does not use disjunction, but rather conjunction: 'just and loving gaze' (*The Sovereignty of Good*, 34).

23 Schaubert, "Murdoch's Morality: Vision, Will and Rules", 482.

24 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 65.

25 Schaubert, "Murdoch's Morality: Vision, Will and Rules", 482.

26 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 103.

*The Fire and the Sun*, Murdoch distinguishes between two kinds of love: love-possession, which tends to absorb the other, and love-respect, which treats the other person as an end.<sup>27</sup> In my view, when Murdoch speaks of love in terms of knowing the other, she stresses an understanding of love as an opening-up toward reality in which the personal I does not count, and this love, which makes it possible to see reality, also entails a close bond that is not merely cognitive, as suggested by the two examples posed by Murdoch in the extract above. Murdoch insists on saying that the love to which she refers is “unsentimental” to avoid the subject reference of the word “sentiment”. A sentimental love is purely subjective and such a love could never lead to knowledge of the other because it is centred on oneself. However, it should be noted that Murdoch is not explicit on the role of emotional relationships in morality. This has sparked comments such as Susan McDonough’s remark that “(...) the place of emotions remains ambiguous in Murdoch’s moral vision.”<sup>28</sup>

The work that must be done involves inner preparation to open ourselves up to a reality that we have prepared ourselves to see in a favourable light. “Seeing reality as it is”—a prized phrase of Murdoch’s—may simply entail preparing ourselves to let it reach us, let it invade us, not opposing it but welcoming it. How does the ego behave? It prefers seeing the world and people through preconceptions, establishing limits. Rather than opening ourselves up to reality, we filter it through the personal and subjective prejudices of the ego. As a result, we are unable to see what is there or what it is like. M is only able to know D when she stops listening to D, seeing D, looking at D from the perspective of her ego’s structures. When she is ready to receive D without the interposition of the ego’s filtering, she can make a positive assessment. LG is a willingness or disposition that comes out of an inner transformation directed toward a loving, accurate reception of the other.

LG is a disposition because:

1. It disposes an individual toward adequate knowledge of the other—knowledge not projected by the ego. “Objective” and “adequate” are synonymous terms from the perspective of grasping the other without the impediments posed by a subjective viewpoint. Accuracy, by contrast, refers to the detail. Attention makes us able to grasp the tiniest details about another person. As McDonough notes, “A moral vision is respectful of the individual. Such visions are ‘objective’ in the sense that what is perceived and known through a moral vision is real, independent of fantasy.”<sup>29</sup>

2. It disposes an individual to love the other.

Therefore, we may link conclude that LG is the key that opens the careful consideration of reality. But if we set a causal link between LG and knowledge of reality we must establish another

27 Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*. (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 36.

28 Susan McDonough, “Iris Murdoch’s Notion of Attention: Seeing the Moral Life in Teaching.” *Philosophy of Education* (2000), 219.

29 McDonough, “Iris Murdoch’s Notion of Attention: Seeing the Moral Life in Teaching”, 220.

prior that links the self-knowledge and inner transformation to the LG. The intense activity in the inner life emerges in a LG which flows into the knowledge of the other.

Murdoch considers great art to be that art which is able to reflect reality as it is, and the great artist is a person who can put his or her I within brackets to “show” others reality as it is, undistorted by the artist’s interpretation: “Great art is connected with courage and truthfulness. There is a conception of truth, a lack of illusion, an ability to overcome selfish obsessions, which goes with good art, and the artist has got to have that particular sort of moral stamina.”<sup>30</sup>

In parallel, one could say LG, in the field of intersubjective relationships, seeks knowledge of the other as the other is. However, this parallelism, which is there in a certain sense, is marked by a radical difference; while the artist, who tries to open up objectively to reality to show it in his or her work as it really is, does not interact with the reality it captures, the knowledge of the other in intersubjective relationships is mediated by a direct relationship with the other that has an impact on knowledge, evaluation and action. The writer, who works to present an aspect of human relationships without the presence of the writer’s I, is not in the same position as an individual seeking to understand the reality of another person in the individual’s daily life by leaving aside the ego. In the example of M and D, Murdoch attempts to be truthful about the existence of the inner life; it requires effort to get the reader to see reality as it is by means of the author’s words. By Murdoch’s effort to show the reality of the inner life—and we take this effort as great art—is not at all comparable to the M’s effort to see D as she is, because M has a relationship with D. When Shakespeare magnificently portrays the reality of a jealous person to the reader without interposing his I, the case differs from a jealous person who makes the effort to look differently upon the object of their jealousy. Despite this difference, the artist and the moral agent share in the process that pushes them toward seeing reality through a loving gaze. This process is marked by a disciplined purification of the ego.

Naturally, if there are only two possibilities, i.e., gaining knowledge of the other through our ego or through a loving gaze, the loving gaze is preferable, because it brings the other closer to the personal I and makes possible a relationship based on who the other really is. Perhaps moral maturity does not require thorough knowledge of the reality of the other, but only internal preparation to become able to see that reality justly and lovingly, whatever it may be. For that reason, moral excellence is not a matter of obtaining an adequate knowledge of the other, or at least it is not strictly that, but rather it resides in a prior positive disposition toward the other, a disposition that makes it possible to see the other without the interposition of the ego, something like “a positive acceptance” of the other.

Is there room for a negative assessment when looking at reality with a loving gaze? If LG is a non-subjective vision of reality, can it by its very nature as non-subjective be evaluative? Or do we evaluate the other only from a vision that is subjective? In fact M does make an appraisal

30 Jeffrey Meyers, “Two interviews with Iris Murdoch.” In *From a Tiny Corner in The House of Fiction*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 225.

of D at first, as an outgrowth of her hostility, and again later, as a consequence of changing her vision. Then what about Swanton's question: "(...) is a loving gaze just as distorting as a hostile one?"<sup>31</sup> Drawing on Murdoch's example, the three kinds of gazing all lead to evaluations, but when Murdoch describes the loving gaze, her explanation appears to:

- a) exclude evaluation, or
- b) the evaluation is always positive if the consequence of LG

For Swanton, "Attention does not entail blindness to others' faults."<sup>32</sup> Snow also states,

A loving gaze could require the mother to acknowledge her daughter-in-law's flaws as facts that are outweighed by her virtues. (...) A loving gaze could require the mother to view her daughter-in-law's flaws and virtues to be intertwined. On this perspective goodness and badness are inseparable components of moral personality.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps LG can be understood as Swanton and Snow would have it, but the evidence of Murdoch's example does not support them; in M's new appreciation of D, not a single trace of her previous assessment remains. More than that, the positive qualities that M sees in D replace the negative ones, which come to seem as though they never existed. It is of little importance that the reader, following M's train of thought, cannot know the moral personality of D. If a genuine LG leads to a recognition of the virtues and flaws of the person who is the object of the gaze, perhaps M's gaze obeys practical reasons more than virtuous motives. In the final analysis, Murdoch points to a variety of reasons for M's changed gaze.

One of the problems encountered in understanding attention as a solely positive assessment of the reality of the other is that it leaves us defenceless against bad people who, seen with LG, would be accepted and valued only positively. We would be putting ourselves, as Snow observes, "(...) at the mercy of truly evil people."<sup>34</sup> What must be done in light of a disposition limited to opening doors onto a positive knowledge of reality? The nature of this attention must be investigated to see whether or not it should be accompanied by a firm intention to fight to change the other person. Attention directed at the other cannot end in a simple approximation to the other's reality when knowledge of the other gives rise to a negative assessment. No matter how much one directs a loving gaze at the other, what one sees may not be entirely positive. Attention is receptivity and appreciation,<sup>35</sup> but it must encompass the totality of the other; attention enables one to see the positive and accept the negative (I do not know whether it is also leads to doing something to contribute to changing the negative), but it cannot be satisfied

31 Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics, A Pluralistic View*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 112.

32 Swanton, *Virtue Ethics, A Pluralistic View*, 113.

33 Snow, "Iris Murdoch's Notion of a Loving Gaze", 488.

34 Snow, "Iris Murdoch's Notion of a Loving Gaze", 494.

35 Swanton, *Virtue Ethics, A Pluralistic View*, 115.

only with the positive. The loving gaze directed by M toward D needs to help her see the positive qualities that, because of her egotistical blindness, she had not known how to see before, but it also needs to help her see any negative qualities that D may have. The nature of the assessment is also critical when taking account of the limits of the will to intervene and change the other. Knocking off the rough psychological edges that are hard to accept insofar as they are different from our own does not appear to be the type of change that fits with acceptance of the other. If we must blend acceptance with an intention to contribute to the other's changing, we need to situate this path in the moral sphere. Attention directed at the other is understood as a loving offering of consideration given to the other, including somehow a contribution to the other's moral betterment.

## Conclusion

The role played by virtue in LG is an issue that leads us to ask whether virtue is a consequence or a cause of LG. Is virtue what changes our vision of the world or is our vision what gives rise to virtue?

As with other concepts, Murdoch does not offer a precise definition of virtue, she gives sufficient indications to see a clear relation between LG and virtue. Speaking of virtue, Murdoch takes two different perspectives necessarily connected: virtue understood as internal disposition and virtue analyzed from the under side of its operations. Virtue says in *The Sovereignty of Good*, is a "good habit and dutiful action"<sup>36</sup> but the essential condition that will allow the action is an internal disposition "just in a good way of vision and quality of consciousness." Virtue is divided into two planes, the internal and external, but only the external causes the internal one; the difference in the states of consciousness can be seen in how we act and choose:

Our states of consciousness Differ in quality, our fantasies and Reveries Unimportant and are not trivial, they are profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act. And if quality of consciousness matters, then anything Which Alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, Objectivity and realism is to be connected with Virtue.<sup>37</sup>

That is why Murdoch says that there is a task to do which is the internal transformation, is the struggle to transcend self-interest, is "the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is."<sup>38</sup> The internal disposition "shines", Murdoch said, in "the great art, (and) humble people who serve others."<sup>39</sup>

If we relate LG with virtue, we see that the LG is one of the elements of virtue understood as an internal disposition: As we have raised, the LG is leading to the knowledge of reality as it is, and in this sense, the LG being an element of virtue as a disposition, Murdoch says that virtue

36 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 91.

37 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 84.

38 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 93.

39 Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 99.

is knowledge that connects us with reality: “The knowledge and imagination which is virtue is precisely the kind which the novelist needs to let his characters be (...).”<sup>40</sup>

Responding to that question based on my interpretation of Murdoch’s example, I would say it is necessary to suppose a virtuous attitude on M’s part for LG to be able to lead her to a more favourable evaluation of D. This virtue brings her to a reconsideration of her opinion of (but not her actions toward) D and it does so by means of self-criticism. In this sense, LG is part of an inner order or virtue; only a virtuous individual is capable of directing a loving gaze at his or her surroundings, but this loving gaze is what determines that he has an accurate and complete vision of the reality of the other, in which good qualities can be seen and other qualities can be accepted or subjected to an effort to change the other. If LG makes prudent knowledge possible (in the Aristotelian sense), this knowledge must be true. As Swanton states, “Love is a way of seeing the world, if you do not see it with a loving eye, virtue is impossible.”<sup>41</sup> This, however, does not make the virtuous individual someone capable of uncritically accepting his or her surroundings. Rather, it enables the virtuous individual’s open disposition to understanding such surroundings. M is a virtuous person because she is somebody who can see D with all D’s flaws and all her virtues.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Murdoch, *Existentialist and Mystics* (London, Penguin Books, 1998), 294.

41 Swanton, *Virtue Ethics, A Pluralistic View*, 110.

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