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Metaphysics and Ethics

– In K. E. Løgstrup and Iris Murdoch

BY

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Abstract

This thesis engages with two modern attempts at retrieving metaphysical reflection into the field of moral philosophy and thus to establish the possibility of interpreting human existence as a whole as morally qualified. On the one hand, the thesis engages with the Danish philosopher and theologian K. E. Løgstrup (1905-1981) and on the other, the British philosopher Iris Murdoch (1909-1999). Both thinkers claim that modern non-metaphysical moral philosophies (often inspired by natural science) are morally problematic and insist that a proper alternative is a moral philosophy which engages in the kind of metaphysical reflection that indicates an ontological affirmation of human existence as a whole. Furthermore, they insist that metaphysical interpretation is needed in order to understand the full scope of the moral condition of the human being and that such interpretation must be founded in phenomenological investigation of familiar, everyday experiences of moral goodness. The thesis engages with three main aspects of shared importance to both thinkers. It also emphasises an important recurrent difference in their understandings of the accomplishment of moral goodness, which both thinkers conceive of as love. The three shared aspects are 1) the continuous movement between empirical phenomenological investigation of everyday experiences of morality and the interpretation of these into a unified metaphysical framework; 2) the idea of an absolute and ubiquitous moral demand as inherent in existence; and 3) the connection between human morality and religion. The recurrent difference regarding the idea of love and the accomplishment of moral goodness is analysed as the classical difference between Greek eros-love in Murdoch and Christian agape-love in Løgstrup, and it is claimed that this is the perhaps most decisive difference in the two thinkers, who initially seem to have a very similar approach – phenomenological – and reach similar conclusions regarding the nature of moral goodness as selfless love of the neighbour.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for reference to books and central essays by Løgstrup and Murdoch. Where references are made to the new editions of Løgstrup's work published by Klim, the dates of first publication are given in square brackets. Regarding Murdoch, the dates of first publication of her essays are also given in square brackets.

K. E. Løgstrup

- ED Løgstrup, K. E. (1997): *The Ethical Demand*, Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.
- NS *Norm og Spontanitet* (Norm and Spontaneity), Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972.
- OK *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard), Aarhus, Klim, 2013 [1968].
- ST *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation), Aarhus, Klim, 2015 [1978].

Iris Murdoch

- IP ‘The Idea of Perfection’, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, New York: Routledge, 2014 [1964]
- SoG ‘The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts’, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, New York: Routledge, 2014 [1967].
- SaG ‘The Sublime and the Good’, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter Conradi (ed.), New York: The Penguin Press, 1997 [1959].
- SBR ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited’, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter Conradi (ed.), New York: The Penguin Press, 1997 [1959].
- DPR ‘The Darkness of Practical Reason’, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter Conradi (ed.), New York: The Penguin Press, 1997 [1966].
- FS ‘The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists’, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter Conradi (ed.), New York: The Penguin Press, 1997 [1976].
- MGM *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, London, Vintage Classics, 1992.

0.0 Introduction

The problem about philosophy, and about life, is how to relate large impressive illuminating general conceptions to the mundane (“messing about”) details of ordinary personal private existence. But can we still use these great images, can they go on helping us? How do the generalizations 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 quotation above is from Dame Iris Murdoch’s (1919-1999) principal philosophical work from 1992, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The questions it poses are also the questions to be investigated in this thesis. Murdoch is not the first philosopher to pose the question about the connection between the ‘muddle’ and incoherence in our day-to-day empirical experience of our world on the one hand, and the need for developing systematised and coherent theories of this empirical ‘muddle’ on the other. By bringing into dialogue two original moral philosophers – regrettably underexposed on the international scene – I aim in this study to shed light upon the often neglected connection between ethics and the need for unifying metaphysical reflection in ethical theorizing, with a special emphasis on the pre-ethical ontological prerequisites for the study of ethics in the first place. Iris Murdoch is one important advocate for this kind of awareness, and another is her Danish contemporary Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905-1981).

There are several good reasons for doing a comparative study of Løgstrup and Murdoch. This will be clear in the course of the study, but I shall initially point out the most important ones. First of all, these two thinkers pose very similar questions regarding human morality and in studying this field they both claim the importance of a combination of empirical day-to-day human experience and metaphysical reflection. Secondly, there has been a recent growing interest in the philosophical and theological resources in both Murdoch and Løgstrup. Although metaphysics might seem to many modern scholars a thing of the past, there has nevertheless recently been a growing interest in the work of both Løgstrup and Murdoch as part of a renewed interest in metaphysical reflection in, e.g., the study of ethics and philosophy of religion. The possible reasons for this will not be developed thoroughly in this study, but in a very broad sense one could say, as Charles Taylor has suggested, that there has recently been a renewed interest in the mystifying fact that some aspects of, or phenomena within, the field of ethics (and existential thought in general) require metaphysical interpretation and cannot be rationally explained (Taylor 1996, 3-5). In this regard, both Murdoch and Løgstrup claim to be

able to point out specific human experiences as indicators that existence is always already ethically qualified. Human morality is thus an ontological aspect of existence, and sovereign goodness in terms of an absolute authority is seen as occupying an unconditional and necessary place in human life.

The nature of this unconditional goodness is, however, interpreted within two fundamentally different metaphysical frameworks, a Christian and a Platonic respectively. In this regard, William Schweiker has pointed out a similar aim in both Christianity and Platonism: both want to find a universal coherence between metaphysics (a view of reality) and ethics (Schweiker 1996, 211). The difference between a Platonic and a Christian inspired metaphysics is not a new discovery, but the philosophical and theological scene has changed dramatically in modernity, and metaphysical and universalist ethical theories are no longer natural starting points. This is what makes it interesting and important to study Murdoch's and Løgstrup's accounts of how these metaphysical frameworks are still relevant for us, and how they both claim that existence is morally qualified. Both Løgstrup and Murdoch write in an age after Kant's Copernican turn, after Romanticism, and after the nihilistic atmosphere arising both as a result of general increasing confidence in science but also as a result of the horrors of World War II with the subsequent nihilism of French existentialism. These historical movements (among many others) influenced both Murdoch and Løgstrup greatly, and they both often refer to existentialism and the scientific ideal (especially within analytic philosophy) as major movements that resulted in a rejection of metaphysics in the study of human morality. As Schweiker points out, the modern individual no longer sees the world – including herself – as created in the image of God (or Good), and the value of things is not derived from their place in the divine order of things (Schweiker 1996, 217). Very broadly speaking, one could say that it became (and still is) common in ethical theory to start from what Løgstrup called a negative ontological point of departure. According to Løgstrup, negative ontology characterises several modern philosophical movements working without any metaphysical assumptions or interpretations regarding our basic existential (and thus also moral) condition. A non-metaphysical ontological point of departure regarding the human ethical situation is (roughly) exemplified in Løgstrup's article 'Ethics and Ontology' from 1960¹: "...I have been thrown into a world that is foreign to me and my aspirations, and I stand before the task of self-sufficiently and freely supplying an outline according to which I want to live my life on the basis of a value system that I construct for myself" (ED, 272). In spite of their very different

¹ The article has been included as an appendix in the English version of *The Ethical Demand* (1997).

philosophical backgrounds and ways of thinking, an explicit opposition to this kind of negative ontology is to be found in both Løgstrup and Murdoch, and this study is an attempt to illuminate their metaphysical counterarguments.

Up until now, Løgstrup has by and large been unknown outside of Scandinavian contexts, and this thesis is thus also an attempt to bring his thought further onto the international academic scene. In terms of recent international interest in Løgstrup, his main work from 1956 *The Ethical Demand* (Den Etske Fordring) was translated into English in 1997 and has since received interest from prominent scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman and Alasdair MacIntyre. A brand-new English anthology of articles on Løgstrup's moral philosophy arrived on the scene in 2017, engaging philosophers and theologians from both the continental and analytic philosophical traditions.² As for Iris Murdoch, who has previously mainly been studied as novelist, she is currently beginning to be recognised in the field of philosophy and theology and studied as a serious moral philosopher and philosopher of religion.³

Although Løgstrup and Murdoch were contemporaries and often engaged in the same philosophical discussions of the time, there is no evidence of their awareness of each other. One obvious reason for Murdoch's ignorance of Løgstrup is of course the fact that the work of Løgstrup was only available in Danish and was thus only discussed within Scandinavian contexts. Løgstrup's ignorance of Murdoch is however not as obvious, and he often discussed contemporary debates in British moral philosophy in which Murdoch also took part.⁴

0.1 Thesis and Methodology

As already suggested above, this study is a comparative study between two contemporary thinkers working within the same field, with a shared interest, I suggest, in very similar fundamental questions about the nature of human morality. The aim is thus to bring these two thinkers into dialogue, which will hopefully result in fruitful discussions and shed new light upon each thinker, as well as upon the field of moral philosophy and philosophy of religion in a broader sense. In order to ensure a sensible comparative analysis, I have sought out what I take to be the three most important aspects common to Murdoch and Løgstrup's work, about which I will circle throughout the study:

² See (Stern and Fink (ed.) 2017) and <https://ethicaldemand.wordpress.com>

³ See e.g. Antonaccio (2012). See also Broackes (ed.) (2012).

⁴ Løgstrup discusses e.g. R. M. Hare's moral philosophy in *Norm og Spontanitet* (Norm and Spontaneity) from 1972; Murdoch also engages with Hare, e.g. in the essay *The Idea of Perfection* from 1962.

The first aspect is the movement between the particular and irreducible individual or situation on the one hand, and the emphasis on the necessity of metaphysical reflections on the human condition on the other. This double focus is explicit in both thinkers, despite the differences regarding their respective philosophical interlocutors; Løgstrup mainly follows Kierkegaard, Luther, Heidegger, and Lipps, whereas Murdoch follows Plato, Freud, Kant, and to some extent Sartre.⁵ The depiction of philosophy as a constant ‘two-way-movement’ between empiricism and metaphysics was suggested by Murdoch herself, and its importance for Murdoch has been critically analysed by Maria Antonaccio (2012, 32-43). This is a helpful approach to both thinkers, because it clarifies the central theme of the thesis: the connection between the concrete ethical situation and its placement within a broader metaphysical framework. Furthermore, the two-way-movement is what enables both thinkers to frame the full scope of human morality and at the same time avoid constructing any totalizing dogmatic systems. The nature of the metaphysical framework is interpretative and remains ultimately inconclusive, and it must always be tested against actual human experiences of morality.

The second aspect regards the moral realism of both thinkers. Following Løgstrup’s terminology, I suggest that the idea of an inherent ‘ethical demand’ is to be found in the thought of both, although Murdoch’s formulation in terms of a ‘moral quest’ in many respects differs from that of Løgstrup. Nevertheless, I suggest that the metaphysical background picture in both thinkers implies an absolute and ubiquitous ethical demand to the individual. A striking similarity between the two thinkers is the content of the demand, which is a demand for *selfless love of the other person*, but this ultimately refers back to either God (Løgstrup) or the Good (Murdoch). As we shall see, Løgstrup focuses on interpersonal love as already *given* in the immediate encounter, whereas Murdoch focuses on the Platonic idea of the individual pilgrimage towards love of the other as an irreducible *reality*.

The third aspect is the religious aspect of ethics, which is important because of the obvious religious connotations connected to both the Christian and Platonic metaphysical framework. However, in this regard there is an important and clear distinction between the term ‘religious’ and specific religious movements, e.g. ‘Christianity’ or ‘Buddhism’. Løgstrup insists that there is no such thing as ‘Christian ethics’, although he suggests the obvious possibility of a Christian religious *interpretation* of the morally qualified human condition. As we shall see, the difference between Christian ethics and a religious interpretation of human

⁵ Løgstrup also discusses Sartre, but he does not adopt the same focus on consciousness as Murdoch does in her moral philosophy.

morality is crucial. Murdoch also suggests that human morality ultimately has religious connotations, but these are not restricted to a specific world religion. Being a declared atheist, Murdoch rejects Christian theism and, as we shall see, her modern retrieval of Plato instead connotes, I suggest, a kind of atheistic spirituality.

Many other connections and dissimilarities could be found, but these three points are sufficient for this thesis, as they represent, I suggest, the most important cornerstones in the two interpretations of human morality. Also, a reading with this focus emphasises the complexity of the two thinkers, for whom it was crucial to avoid any fixed systems or theories, but who still remained aware of the importance of metaphysical reflection – no one can avoid taking a stand in this regard, and there are no neutral ones in the field of human morality! Thus, according to both thinkers, any philosophical dream of a neutral investigation of morals as a kind of (natural) scientific field is impossible and is at best an instance of self-deception.⁶

Over the course of the investigation of the connection between ethics and ontology in Murdoch and Løgstrup, I shall use the above-mentioned distinction between non-metaphysical and metaphysical ontology suggested by Løgstrup himself (ED, 272). The distinction has further been demonstrated as an effective approach to interpretation by Svein Aage Christoffersen (Christoffersen 2017, 170). Løgstrup also calls his metaphysical ontology ‘affirmative ontology’ as opposed to negative non-metaphysical ontologies, such as we see in, e.g., Sartre, which he calls negative ontology: “One could call the first possibility an ontological affirmation, the second an ontological negation (or anthropological affirmation)” (ED, 272). I suggest that this distinction is sufficient in this context, because it clarifies how metaphysical ontology is a general structure in both Murdoch and Løgstrup. The affirmative ontology as a point of departure also underlies both their moral realism and their connections of ethics to religious interpretation.

With the seemingly strong emphasis on metaphysics, it remains crucial to clarify that the focus of the investigation of the connection between ethics and metaphysics will mainly be its anthropological dimension and will not include any separate systematic analyses of metaphysics in itself. This is because the metaphysical aspect of ethics argued for by Murdoch and Løgstrup is in no way unambiguously dogmatic or detached from the human being; the central interest in both thinkers remains the *human* situation as morally qualified – this qualification requiring metaphysical reflection. Thus, the metaphysical frameworks rather serve as important and decisive background pictures for the human interpretation of the ethical

⁶ Charles Taylor has named this the inescapability of ‘strong evaluations’ in the study of ethics (Taylor 1989, 32).

condition, and it remains crucial for both to state that metaphysical reflection must be adequate imaginative interpretation of the human condition rather than dogmatic speculation (Antonaccio 2012, 4; Christoffersen 2017, 181). Regarding Løgstrup, this renders what is often referred to as his anthro-phenomenological work – often associated with his early work – the focal point of the investigation. The focus is thus on his conception of interpersonal ethical phenomena, the Sovereign Expressions of Life, rather than the full scope of the cosmo-phenomenological or fundamental ontological investigations of the later four volumes on metaphysics. Among the later works I shall only engage with *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation) from 1978 because of its important discussion of the connection between ethics, metaphysics, and religion. The fundamental question in Løgstrup’s ethics was and remains the interpersonal situation and the question about how I should relate to the other person when a part of his or her life is laid in my hands (Fink 2007, 48). Regarding Murdoch, I shall follow the same line as in the readings of Løgstrup and focus mainly on the anthropological implications of her metaphysical deliberations rather than the separate cosmological implications of her connection of metaphysics and ethics. As in the investigation of Løgstrup, I engage with Murdoch’s Platonic metaphysics in order to understand the *human* situation.

0.2 Structure

The thesis is divided into two parts, of which the first part is the longest, as it engages with two of the three aspects mentioned above. Thus, the first part of the thesis investigates Løgstrup’s and Murdoch’s conceptions of the human self as part of the larger structure of a morally qualified existence. The analysis corresponds with the first two aspects of the overall analysis and thus illuminates the two-way-movement between the empirical phenomena of human experience and how the human being is always already subject to a moral demand in its inevitable relation to a moral absolute. The second part of the thesis investigates the important question about the religious connotations in Murdoch’s and Løgstrup’s accounts of human morality, and it thus illuminates the third aspect of the overall analysis.

PART I

Metaphysical Frameworks of the Moral Self

This part of the thesis will illuminate the metaphysical background pictures of the two thinkers' ethical thinking. What characterises both Løgstrup's and Murdoch's approaches to metaphysics, as mentioned above, is their awareness of the dangers of proposing any fixed systems or theories within the field of ethics (Aaboe Sørensen 2014; Antonaccio 2012).⁷ What will be clear, especially in Løgstrup's Lipps-inspired phenomenology, is the interpretative approach to metaphysics in both thinkers. Metaphysics is not to be understood in any classical dogmatical or 'substantial' sense, but as phenomenological interpretation of certain ethical experiences that indicate specific fundamental structures of existence (Thomassen 2005, 118). Following the emphasis on the two-way-movement in the introduction, this part of the thesis will illuminate both the underlying metaphysical frameworks and the anthropological implications these have for the moral self, which inevitably form the point of departure in moral reflection. Furthermore, this part will also shed light on the idea of an absolute moral demand in both Murdoch and Løgstrup, who both claim to find a demand of selfless love of the neighbour, but do so on very different terms regarding both their metaphysical framework and anthropological presuppositions.

⁷ It is worth noting here that it is of course not a unique feature of Murdoch and Løgstrup to work in a continuous movement between empirical analysis and theory or, in other words, between phenomenological analysis and metaphysics in the study of ethics. Metaphysical reflection in ethics in modern philosophy, employing a similar strategy to Løgstrup and Murdoch, is also to be found in, e.g., Emmanuel Levinas. Engaging with Levinas would exceed the scope of this study. Zygmunt Bauman has provided an enlightening juxtaposition of Løgstrup and Levinas (Bauman 2007, 231-61).

K. E. Løgstrup

1.0 The Ethical Demand

This chapter considers the structure of Løgstrup's idea of a specific ethical demand that can be derived from our immediate experience of interpersonal reality (ED, 17). This idea is elaborated in ED, mainly through an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of *trust* (Dan. 'tillid'). According to Løgstrup, trust instantiates the interdependent structure of our social lives, and, as we shall see, *interdependence* is exactly what makes up the foundation of our ethical lives. Although Løgstrup first uses the term in the later publication *Kunst og Etik* (Eng. Art and Ethics) from 1961, the idea of interdependence is already to be found in the analyses of ED (Rabjerg 2017, 94). Furthermore, it is a central idea in Løgstrup's moral philosophy that the phenomenon of trust, inherent in existence itself and a key part of fundamental human experience, contains a radical, one-sided and silent ethical demand, directed towards every single individual.

I begin with an outline of the content of the ethical demand as it is expounded in ED, in order to then give an account of how this demand presupposes a specific ontology and anthropology. The formulation of the ethical demand begins with an analysis of the empirical dimension of the demand, which is the fact that we are always already, to some extent, holding some of our neighbour's life in our hand in the particular encounter – and vice versa. Whereas other philosophers and theologians, e.g. Kierkegaard and Murdoch, begin their investigations with the moral *self*, characteristically Løgstrup's point of departure is not the isolated self and its relation to itself mediated through a relation to an absolute moral authority. Instead he takes a phenomenological approach in his investigation of what he suggests is an ethically constituted phenomenon present *between* me and the other person. Ethics is always interpersonal, and Løgstrup claims that a phenomenon like trust is pre-reflectively always already experienced as a phenomenon that has a moral claim on us (ED, 18).

In order to avoid misunderstandings, a brief specification of Løgstrup's phenomenological approach is needed. Løgstrup's strategy follows Heidegger and Lipps⁸ in the sense that it is the ontological interpretation of *experienced* phenomena which make up the results of the investigation. Løgstrup is thus not working on any strictly logical or scientific

⁸ References to Lipps occur frequently in the footnotes of ED, see. e.g. p. 33 (footnote 1), p. 65, p. 67 and p. 193. There are no direct references to Heidegger in ED, but I suggest that the reference is clear from the particular type of phenomenological approach, which follows central ideas in Heidegger, along with the reflections on Heidegger in his book on Heidegger and Kierkegaard published prior to ED: *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung*, (Løgstrup, 2013 [1950]). My claim is further backed up by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre in their introduction to the English version of ED.

basis, but, in a similar way to Heidegger, he wants to investigate the *pre-scientific* structure of ethical phenomena. As Patrick Stokes writes, Løgstrup appeals in his investigation to the phenomenologically given goodness inherent in phenomena like trust; he does not refer to any independent conception of the good, but instead claims that ontologically – i.e. in the way the phenomenon presents itself in our experience of it – the goodness of trust is simply self-evident (Stokes 2017, 282).

I return now to the analysis of trust. Løgstrup writes: “It is a characteristic of human life that we normally encounter one another with natural trust. This is true not only in the case of persons who are well acquainted with one another but also in the case of complete strangers” (ED, 8). It is important here to notice how Løgstrup refers to trust as an aspect of human *life* rather than an aspect of human *nature*. Here we see the first implication of the claim that trust is something always already *given* that happens *between us*, rather than a virtue of the will. This has important implications for Løgstrup’s anthropology, but for now it is sufficient to notice how Løgstrup emphasises that trust is a crucial precondition for the very possibility of human communication. Without trust, human communication would be impossible: “...initially we trust one another. This may indeed seem strange, but it is a part of what it means to be human. Human life could hardly exist if it were otherwise.” (ED, 8). But, he claims, there is always a risk connected to trusting. When we attend to someone, we trust the other person to be open and receiving but we run the risk of not being met and thus of our immediate trust being destroyed: “To trust, however, is to lay oneself open. This is why we react vehemently when our trust is “abused”, as we say, even though it may have been only in some inconsequential matter” (ED, 9). Trust underlies all communication and is, in principle, always there before any human discrediting of it. When communication fails, it is because one or both parts were not met in their need – or at least did not feel as if they were – when a part of their lives was handed over to the other. This also stresses Rabjerg’s point that interdependence is fundamental in Løgstrup; we are always already ‘handed over’ to our neighbour and vice versa and it is a fundamental aspect of human life that we are in each other’s power (Rabjerg 2017, 97). In this way, Løgstrup suggests, conflicts which we normally explain as originating from someone breaking a social rule, which often occur when two different worldviews collide, are often reactions to something far more elementary, that is, the disappointment and pain occurring when one is not met in one’s trust in the other to receive properly what one has handed over of oneself to his or her power: “There is a third reason why the conflict vents itself in moral accusations. It must at all costs never become apparent to the other person, and preferably not even to ourselves, that it is a matter of disappointed expectation, because though

we have been exposed we are at pains not to admit it” (ED, 11). This also indicates the selfless nature of the proper care of the part of the neighbour that one has been given in the specific encounter – as soon as I use the other’s trust for my own purpose, trust has been turned into self-indulgence.

To elaborate the phenomenologically developed idea of the elementary character of trust, Løgstrup exemplifies how trust is not merely something we choose to show, but something always already deeply interwoven in the structure of life. Trust is there before we get the chance to reflect upon it. When we contemplate other people on our own, we often tend to think about them as having a certain character or as being ‘this kind of person’. Sometimes we might even think of others with hostility and be annoyed by something we attribute to them. However, Løgstrup suggests, our more or less fixed ideas of others mostly seem to alter and ‘open up’ the moment we see them face-to-face – unless we have a very strong reason to dislike a person no matter what:

Why does the picture break down? This is a difficult question to answer, because what happens in this connection is something basic, something anterior to all morality and convention. An adequate account is impossible. [...] To associate with or encounter personally another person always means to be “in the power of” his or her words and conduct. Psychology refers to this as the power of suggestion. [...] But it is even more basic than this. Not to let the other person emerge through words, deeds and conduct, but to hinder this instead by our suspicion [...] is a denial of life. It is the very nature of human existence that it does not want to be reduced to reactions – even wise reactions – which are determined solely by what has already happened. It is in the very nature of human existence that it wants to be just as new as the other person’s new words, new deeds, and new conduct. [...] We might call this a trust in life itself, in the ongoing renewal of life (ED, 13-14).

This passage is crucial in several regards. First of all, it illuminates the pre-moral status Løgstrup ascribes to trust. As Stokes (2017, 282) remarked, the goodness of trust is ontologically founded, and it must be understood as a phenomenon occurring *before* any human construction of moral conventions. It thus clarifies Løgstrup’s phenomenological approach mentioned above. To use Heidegger’s terminology from *Sein und Zeit*, trust must be understood here on an ontological level, which precedes the ontic level of scientific psychology.⁹ Lastly, the passage further supports the idea that trust is a phenomenon belonging

⁹ See, e.g., *Sein und Zeit* §10

to life itself in the sense that it is interwoven in the continuous renewal of life. It almost resembles Dasein's continuous 'becoming' qua the inherent *modes* of existence (*Existentialien*) in Heidegger. However, trust in Løgstrup is not merely Dasein's mode of existence, I contend, but a mode of life itself that establishes human interdependence as fundamental and shows how the continuous renewal of life happens through trust as an external and morally qualified phenomenon. Thought of in this way, trust is a phenomenon working *through* us as an existential modus of continuous becoming (Dan. 'fornylse'), and not as a function of the human will. The parallel made to Heidegger is in line with Løgstrup's own engagement with Heidegger both in his early and later work.¹⁰

A natural critique of this categorisation of trust is to suggest that the same could be said of the opposite phenomenon of mistrust. One could say that it is possible to experience mistrust as something which simply happens without one actually wanting to mistrust the other person. To this Løgstrup answers in a footnote: "Trust and distrust are not two parallel ways of life. Trust is basic; distrust is the absence of trust. This is why we do not normally advance arguments and justifications for trust as we do for distrust. To use a modern philosophical expression, distrust is the "deficient form" of trust" (ED, 18). The idea of mistrust as a deficient modus is in keeping with Stokes' point that, in Løgstrup, the fundamental goodness of life is ontologically verified through phenomenological analysis, whereas, as we shall see shortly, evil, including a phenomenon like mistrust, is not an ontological part of life itself but can only be ascribed to the human will. As Rabjerg points out, Løgstrup admits that to claim that trust is an ontological aspect of life itself and mistrust is a human fabrication is a metaphysical *interpretation* (Rabjerg 2017, 103; ED, 140). However, if we claim that trust is our own accomplishment, we turn it into self-indulgence, and the evident inherent goodness of trust as something *given* and thus *selfless* vanishes – trust is there before the self-will (Rabjerg 2017, 103). In ED, Løgstrup adds another important feature to the interpretation of trust, claiming that the analysis further indicates that the given goodness of trust is a 'gift of life' that we must continuously *receive*: "Inherent in the insight that trust and love are not of our making is the understanding that life as a whole, our very existence, is a gift which we have received" (ED, 140). We have not ourselves created our life, and we live on what has been given us before we willed or created anything ourselves (ED, 19-20). The idea of life as a gift is thus the foundation of Løgstrup's affirmative ontology, and ultimately one must accept the gift-metaphor

¹⁰ For the early engagement with Heidegger see Løgstrup (2013 [1950]). For the later engagement see, e.g., the analysis of time in *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation), 2015.

connected to the interpretation of trust to fully follow Løgstrup's analysis of human morality (Christoffersen 2017, 182-83). Løgstrup has in this regard referred to his ethics as 'ontological' as opposed to deontological and teleological ethics (Løgstrup 2014, 12; ED, 171). As Christoffersen has pointed out, Løgstrup's classification of his own ethics as 'ontological' does not mean he suggests that other types of ethical theories do not have any ontology. What Løgstrup is anxious to stress is that his position is – in opposition to modern types of teleological and deontological ethics – based on an 'ontological affirmation' where the ontology of existence as a whole is interpreted as morally qualified (Christoffersen 2017, 170). This is what he shows, I suggest, with the metaphysical interpretation of life as a gift. Furthermore, Løgstrup insists that his ethics is formulated in purely *human* terms, which means that although he draws on several Christian (Lutheran) insights in the course of his analysis of human morality, he insists that they depict universal and fundamental features of existence. This means that they must be understood as *metaphysical* insights that do not belong to one specific religion (ED, 1-5). I investigate Løgstrup's conception of religion in more detail in the second part of the thesis.

Firstly, however, it is important to analyse how Løgstrup connects the analysis of trust and human interdependence to the idea of an absolute ethical demand. On the basis of the analysis of trust and the givenness of life, Løgstrup goes on to claim that there is an absolute, universal, and inescapable ethical demand inherent therein, which demands of me to take care of the part of the life of the other person which is handed over to me in our specific and historically contingent encounter. Because trust is the foundation of interpersonal life and constitutes the foundation of our mutual interdependence, life contains an inherent demand to take care of the part of his or her life with which I have been trusted – *entirely* for his or her sake and with no regard to my own wishes or needs. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, there are six important characteristics of the demand (MacIntyre 2017, 259). I follow MacIntyre's instructive short outline, adding a seventh point about the unfulfillability of the demand, which he leaves out.

First of all, the demand is silent and invisible. It is an unspoken demand from life itself, occurring through the fact that trust lays parts of other people's lives in our hands in varying degrees at various times. It is thus not a demand we can make on each other, and there are no guidelines as to how the demand should be fulfilled: "It is of the essence of the demand that with such insight, imagination, and understanding as he or she possesses a person must figure out for him or herself what the demand requires" (ED, 22). It is worth noticing Løgstrup's choice of formulation regarding the idea that a part of the other's life is laid in one's hands; it

is not a willed action of the other to be, to some extent, at my mercy, but this is simply a fundamental structure of life.

Secondly, the demand is radical and ubiquitous. It is demanded that I obey it in the sense that I unselfishly help my neighbour, no matter who my neighbour is and what situation we are in (ED, 44). This reflects the classical Christian (Lutheran) idea of neighbour-love. Løgstrup describes the demand as radical, because of its one-sided and silent nature, which demands that I take care of my neighbour entirely for his or her sake, without any prescriptions as to how this is to be done (ED, 44). In this way it conflicts with our own situation – we do not immediately care unconditionally for strangers – and we often (more or less consciously) take some kind of reciprocity into account when we help others. Therefore, we compromise with the demand through social norms. Social norms often yield specific advice as to how one is expected to deal with a specific situation, and they thus delimit situations so that one can ‘get it over with’. This is however not the case regarding the absolute and ubiquitous demand. One is never ‘done’ with one’s neighbour, and one can never be entirely sure whether one did the best one could in a situation: “Here [regarding the demand] there is no prevailing norm to guide us. The fact out of which the demand arises, namely, that his or her life is more or less in my hands, is a fact which has come into being independently of either him or her or me” (ED, 46).

Thirdly, it is emphasised that I am demanded to do what is best for *the other*. This is not to be mistaken for what the other person might want. It is left to me to estimate what he or she needs – to the best of my ability – and in this way to “...free the other person from his or her confinement and to give his or her vision the widest possible horizon” (ED, 27). A beggar on the street might want money from me, but this does not mean that this is what is best for her. It is my task to estimate what I can do to help her by carefully attending to what would in fact help *her* (not me or my conscience) and then to act accordingly. In this way, the ideal moral agent acts selflessly and is fully occupied with the needs of *the other*. This is initially strikingly similar to Murdoch’s idea of the selfless moral agent who attends to the other person, although there are decisive differences regarding the metaphysical background picture.

Fourthly, I must take the established social norms into account. Although they can be used to compromise with the demand in a way that leads to indifference, this is not necessarily the case. The social norms also have a positive and necessary role in our social lives in the sense that helping the other person must take place within a social *form*. The silent demand must be mediated through social norms in order to avoid self-indulgent sentimentality and immodesty (ED, 19). As we shall also see in Murdoch, Løgstrup suggests that the ‘will to form’

is an elementary part of human existence which contrasts with the immediate formlessness of the silent demand of neighbour-love. All our relations with others are characterised by the fact that they are mediated through human *forms* of language and norms for social behaviour, and thus the social norms can function as the medium through which the demand demands to be fulfilled. As Fink mentions, we need the norms in order for our social lives to function – life without social form is unbearable and would most likely be a horrible affair (Fink 2007, 55).¹¹ Despite the need for form however, it is crucial to remember that the demand cannot be reduced to social norms. The demand is a ‘demand of love’ (ED, 21), and as such it underlies every human encounter as timeless and universal. On the other hand, we *also* inevitably live with various other demands based on common sense norms of social justice. Løgstrup’s point is that in this regard the demand of selfless care of the other is much more fundamental, and as such it makes up the unifying aspect of human morality, which is then refracted through the forms of human social norms (Fink 2017, 71). It is thus important for Løgstrup to state that in obeying the demand, one might have to act against the social norms, although one cannot, of course, justify this directly by reference to a universal demand of love. The demand remains silent, and the agent is alone responsible for his or her actions. As we shall see later, the idea of moral unity within human existence is also what permeates Murdoch’s philosophy.

Fifthly, although the demand is radical it is not limitless. One should never take over the whole responsibility for the other person (or a whole people for that matter), although it might be tempting to interpret the demand to mean that one can claim to have an absolute power to decide what is best for the other: “We cannot intrude upon his or her individuality and will, upon his or her personhood, in the same way that we can affect his or her emotions and in some instances even his or her destiny” (ED, 26). In much the same way, fulfilling the demand is not equal to sacrificing oneself – helping one’s neighbour to flourish is not the same as neglecting one’s own life and individuality. It is rather a careful assessment of what one can reasonably do to help – to remember (also) to take care of oneself is not necessarily selfish (ED, 137-38).

Sixthly, and this is connected to point four, obeying the demand is not the same as following a rule. At this point Løgstrup objects to the rigidity of Kantian and other types of rule-based ethical systems. What is important to point out here is Løgstrup’s strong emphasis on the *particularity* of the situation together with the emphasis on genuine *love* as motivation

¹¹ For a thorough investigation of the complementarity between the demand and the social norms see, e.g., Fink (2017).

for helping the other – raising a child in strict accordance with the norms of child-raising but without love is of no help to the child (ED, 62). The particularity of the situation must precede any set of moral rules, although social norms very often guide us in deciding what to do (ED, 58-59). Very often situations demand personal judgment and here it is impossible to refer only to norms and rules: “Here motive is often very influential in determining whether or not our obedience to the social norms will really be of help to a person” (ED, 61).

1.1 Negative Anthropology

The last characteristic of the demand concerns the unfulfillability of the demand and deserves a more extensive elaboration, because it reveals decisive anthropological presuppositions in Løgstrup. The unfulfillability of the demand is clear from the fact that what the demand demands cannot be *willed*. As we have seen, the trust and love which the demand demands is always already there prior to our willed actions. It is only in mistrust that we discover the lack of trust which should have been there. What the demand demands is thus to be superfluous, and here it is important to emphasise a decisive feature of the demand: it is, according to Løgstrup, more important to stress that it is *unselfishness* which is demanded, rather than stressing that unselfishness is *demanded* (Fink 2010, 523). The curious thing is the fact that unselfishness cannot be willed without self-will, but it is exactly the destruction of self-will that the demand demands: “In a sense, our attempts at obedience actually work against the demand, for every attempt at obedience is an expression of that which the demand opposes, namely, the will to be sovereign in our own life” (ED, 146). The metaphysical assertions about life and especially *human nature* underlying this passage make up the theme of what follows. The unfulfillability reveals the *negative anthropology* in Løgstrup in strong contrast to his *affirmative ontology*, and in ED the negative anthropology seems to render the demand unfulfillable at *any* time: “The self brings everything under the power of its selfishness. Man’s will is in its power; addressed to our will, the demand to love is an impossible demand” (ED, 141).¹² As we shall see, it is exactly the human *will* that renders the demand unfulfillable.

In spite of this, Løgstrup’s claim that the demand is unfulfillable has been criticised, e.g. by MacIntyre, who writes: “Løgstrup’s account is flawed. The notion that we can be required to respond to a demand that is always and inevitably unfulfillable is incoherent. If I say to you ‘This cannot be done; do it’, you will necessarily be baffled” (MacIntyre 2007, 164).

¹² This view is later modified and specified with the introduction of the sovereign expressions of life, but in this paragraph I focus on ED and the negative anthropology connected to the unfulfillability of the radical demand.

MacIntyre's view has however been criticised by a number of other Løgstrup scholars (Stokes 2017; Martin 2017; Stern 2017) and drawing on their recent critical objections to MacIntyre's view along with Svend Andersen's illuminating demonstration of the connection between Løgstrup and Luther, I will emphasise the necessity of a close investigation of the metaphysical, ontological, and relevant anthropological presuppositions connected to Løgstrup's claim.

First of all, unfulfillability is directly connected to the Lutheran anthropology taken up by Løgstrup (Andersen 2007, 70-73). Along with the persistent emphasis on the fact that life has been given to us, in the sense that we do not owe our own existence to ourselves, Løgstrup claims that, because of the evil human will, our life 'ethically speaking consists in contradiction' (ED, 165).¹³ The negative anthropology present in ED is not obvious from the beginning, but it becomes more and more evident further on. In the chapter 'Is there a Christian Ethics?' Løgstrup explains that the ethical demand is always 'refracted' by three dimensions of our lives. On a general level, the demand is refracted through the fact that we are always already entangled with one another through interpersonal relationships. Secondly, and more specifically, the demand is refracted by the specific situation in which I am standing now, face to face with my neighbour. Both of these dimensions represent the given condition of our lives, namely the fact that we are handed over to each other in trust and that, through trust as ontologically good in itself, life naturally suggests that we take care of our neighbour. These two dimensions of refraction thus correspond with the goodness inherent in life itself, and Løgstrup says as follows: "It is important that these various relationships not oppose the demand but point in the same direction that it does. Through each one of them [...] the individual holds something of the other person's life in his hands" (ED, 107). The last dimension by which the demand is refracted is the 'nature of the individual'. In this regard, however, Løgstrup claims, with reference to Luther, that human nature goes directly against the demand:

Beyond all this, the demand is also refracted by a person's own nature, and that nature does not elicit the same actions that the demand does. Indifference and apathy make a person unimaginative. Self-assertion and desire to get ahead distort the fact from which the demand emerges. [...] Briefly stated, while the radical demand is furthered when it is refracted by the

¹³ The distinction between life as 'given' and life as a 'gift' is important, because the latter connotes the religious idea of a 'giver'. Whether one is religious or not, Løgstrup claims that the givenness of life understood in strictly human terms is sufficient for the phenomenological validity of the demand (Fink 2015, 521).

unique relationships in which we live our lives, it is hindered in its course when it is refracted by our nature (ED, 108).

In a footnote to this paragraph Løgstrup refers directly to Luther: “It is the fundamental idea in Luther’s ethic of vocation which I have been trying to express here, though without employing either his detailed development of it or his language” (ED, 108). Thus Løgstrup takes up Luther’s basic idea, although without the specific and detailed historical context of Luther’s idea. Furthermore, as Andersen remarks, it is important to remember that the term ‘nature’ in this context cannot be understood biologically, but must be understood in accordance with Luther’s thought that we must take the unfulfillability on us as our own fault. Theologically speaking, Løgstrup is thus working with the idea of *radical guilt* (Andersen 2007, 72-73). Human selfishness and self-assertion must be understood in a radical sense, which means that it is the *will* itself which is evil and gives everything it encounters a selfish form: “Or, stated in other words, what we spoke of a moment ago as a human being’s personal “account” is really his or her will, and the radical character of guilt consists in the fact that it is the human will which is selfish and evil” (ED, 141).

Løgstrup elsewhere suggests that the selfishness ascribed to human nature is also what leads to our resistance to the demand. As mentioned above, we normally count on some degree of reciprocity in all our social relations, and this can lead to a total dismissal of the view that life must be received as something given (ED, 115). Instead, we conclude that if we have a responsibility for the other person, the same is the case the other way around. But according to Løgstrup, this can never be the case. Included in the worldview of the ethical demand, the individual has been given his or her life and cannot, in principle, demand *anything* in life as his or her *right*: “...life and all that it contains has been given us, and there is nothing in our life to justify our making a counterdemand upon another person” (ED, 116). If we reject the demand with the inherent view that life is something given and must be received unselfishly as such, we make ourselves sovereign of our own lives. But, according to Løgstrup, this cannot be true, because the human being did not create itself, and he or she “...possesses nothing which he or she has not received as gift” (ED, 116).

From Løgstrup’s chapter in ED on the possible destructive character of the demand, it is possible to derive the important difference between human nature in its metaphysically qualified Lutheran-ontological sense and what has been translated as the ‘natural basis’, which is human nature in its non-metaphysical biological sense. As Andersen has drawn attention to, one can easily confuse the Lutheran sense of the term with the more common-sense biological

sense of the word. The difference has been pointed out by Løgstrup himself in terms of the alternation between ‘human nature’ and ‘natural basis’, and it is important to have the term ‘natural basis’ in mind in connection with Løgstrup’s deliberations on the role of what he names ‘natural love’ *vis-à-vis* the ethical demand. Natural love is, e.g., what is seen between parents and children: “Where natural love prevails between two people, the lives of both are successful [...] If parents take care of their children and bring them up wisely, there is a good chance not only that the children will succeed, but that the parents will also” (ED, 124). One might thus immediately think that in close human relationships, borne by natural love and care for the other, the demand is fulfilled and thus superfluous. Løgstrup admits that the reciprocity involved in natural love does not initially seem to contradict to the one-sidedness of the ethical demand, because the parts are so closely entangled in mutual love: “The action to which natural love moves a person is therefore motivated by the fact that it serves both his or her flourishing and our own. These two concerns simply cannot be separated from each other” (ED, 125). In this way, Løgstrup suggests: “...it is hard to see why natural love should in this respect be regarded as contrary to the one-sided demand. [...] Natural love and the one-sided demand have a common understanding of life” (ED, 127).

However, the underlying strict Lutheran anthropology and the socio-biological contingency ascribed to natural love distort the harmonious picture. In the end, Løgstrup insists that the ‘purity’ in the realisation of the love phenomena (e.g. trust), which life itself offers us, will always to some extent be degraded and ruined by the evil will of the human being, because natural love *always* in some way ‘receives its shape from the self’ (ED, 131). Secondly, for socio-biological reasons, natural love never lasts in a total and unconditionally pure way in the relationships that it creates, because of the ultimate contingency of all human affairs. Natural love is and remains ‘biologically, psychologically, and sociologically conditioned’ (ED, 134). This results in an ambiguous relationship between natural love and the natural basis, in the sense that the natural basis conditions natural love and at the same time destroys it (ED, 134). Løgstrup’s own example is the common case where parents try to live their own dreams through their children, and thus, to some extent, only love the child on the condition that it pursues the parent’s dream. Although not all parents fit this picture, Løgstrup’s point is that it is impossible *always* to be *entirely* loving and unselfish and that in any intimate relationship conflicts will arise – natural love in any pure sense inevitably fails as circumstances change through time: conflicts arise between the consideration for the other and for oneself, and at some point the demand will inevitably arise (ED, 135). Thus, one could say that natural love is conditioned in a double sense; the metaphysically determined evil will always disfigures

natural love, which is furthermore always already conditioned by the (contingent) biological human nature. The demand is unfulfillable, because it only is heard when it has been violated, and, as mentioned above, any attempt of the will to fulfil it is not an instance of the immediate and spontaneous pure love with which, according to Løgstrup, the demand is to be fulfilled.

However, Løgstrup's very strict application of Luther's negative anthropology causes some serious problems for the possibility of an actual realisation of trust and natural love in human life on the one hand, and the destructive power ascribed to the human will on the other, and these eventually lead to a modification of his thought (Niekerk 2017, 189). Because of the strictness of his anthropology, Løgstrup finds himself forced to hypostasise love and trust and work with them as speculative entities:

But the only love we know anything about from our own actual existence is a natural love to which we have given our own self's selfish form; any other kind of love is pure speculation. In other words – to put it in philosophical terms – to speak about natural love in the manner of this discussion is to hypostasise it (ED, 138).

If good (natural love) and evil are real, Løgstrup suggests, they cannot consist in human approximations which tend to relativize everything into quantitative categories of 'more or less'. In order to retain the categories of good and evil as qualitatively different Løgstrup has to hypostasise the idea of the 'pure good' in order to reduce neither the goodness of life nor the evil nature of the human will to something relative. But is this really true, when one takes Løgstrup's own phenomenological approach into account? Is it possible to derive an idea of 'pure' love as the basic human experience of the goodness of life, if this phenomenon is always already distorted? Løgstrup himself writes that goodness is the basis of life itself despite the evil will of the human being (ED, 140). This critique was also made by the Danish theologian Ole Jensen, who drew attention to the fact that it is a contradiction to claim the existence of pure goodness as an inherent structure of life and then also claim that this goodness is speculative (OK, 117). In the later work *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard) from 1968, Løgstrup answers this critique by adding an important new feature to his moral philosophy. He does not modify the absolute contradiction between the goodness of life and the evil ascribed to the human being, but instead admits that the goodness of life must in the end be *sovereign* over the evil will of man. As we shall shortly see, this results in the introduction of the idea of 'Sovereign Expressions of Life'.

Firstly, however, I will return to the critique posed by MacIntyre. With the above analysis in mind, there are now various ways of responding to MacIntyre's dismissal of the claim that the demand be unfulfillable. As Wayne Martin has suggested, MacIntyre seems to mistake the silent *demand* for a *command*. This conflicts with the silent nature of the demand, which does not command any specific action, but it simply demands one to care for the neighbour in the best possible way one can imagine (Martin 2017, 326). One could add that whereas commands belong to the category of social norms and thus are conditioned by the human context, the ethical demand is a pre-reflective phenomenon, woven into the structure of life itself and independent of human reasoning. This critique is connected to the fact that MacIntyre does not seem to take the full scope of Løgstrup's metaphysical and ontological presuppositions properly into account when he, e.g., ignores the very different ontological status of 'trust' in Løgstrup to the status as a 'virtue' which it might be ascribed within a Thomistic context, with which he compares Løgstrup's position (Stokes 2017, 282; Stern 2017, 317-18). In Løgstrup, trust can never be a human virtue, because of its ontological structure. Keeping the Heideggerian 'ontological difference' in mind is thus of utmost importance in the reading of Løgstrup's ethics, although Løgstrup's difference is of course between unconditional goodness and conditioned 'good' actions, whereas Heidegger differs between unconditional structures of 'Being' and conditioned 'beings'. In spite of this, I take the parallel to be illuminating, as it prevents the mistake of analysing the demand on ontic terms, like MacIntyre trying to understand the demand on human (logical) conditions and thus overlooking the *unconditional* nature of the demand: it applies to all situations at all times as a structure of life itself.

1.2 Sovereign Expressions of Life

We have now seen how, in ED, Løgstrup finds himself forced to create a speculative hypostasis of unconditional 'natural love', because human beings cannot possess such love. From the fact that the human will is always more or less selfish, Løgstrup concluded that pure unconditional love can only be thought of in an abstract sense, which inevitably makes the concept of natural love rather ambiguous. In *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, Løgstrup however makes a decisive change in his previously very strict Lutheran idea of the pervasive power of sin, which made it impossible for him to avoid an abstraction of the absolute good (Niekerk 2017, 189). The background of the change is founded in a controversy with Kierkegaard, but in this context I

shall mainly focus on the development of the life-expressions in relation to *The Ethical Demand* and only briefly touch upon the Kierkegaardian context.

The abstraction of the absolute from finite life is something Løgstrup ascribes to Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity (along with Kierkegaard's subsequent followers in a specific Danish theological movement called *Tidehverv*), and following the arguments developed in ED, Løgstrup thus introduces his new alternative by means of controverting some of (what he sees as) Kierkegaard's central ideas. Before moving on to these central ideas, it is necessary to clarify the specific Danish context for Løgstrup's controversy with Kierkegaard, because of the very radical character of Løgstrup's reading of Kierkegaard, which has been criticised by several Kierkegaard scholars. For instance, George Pattison has criticised Løgstrup for going too far when he asserts that Kierkegaard pleads for a neglect of finitude, that he focuses solely on the exclusive personal relation to the absolutely transcendent God, and that he thus neglects the importance of caring love for the neighbour (Pattison 2017, 95). Pattison suggests that Kierkegaard is not as radical as Løgstrup asserts, which is, e.g., evident from his *Works of Love* (1847) and also already in the three upbuilding discourses from 1843 (Pattison 2017, 95-97).¹⁴ In these works, Kierkegaard stresses the importance of finitude and the concrete relation to the neighbour, who should be loved *through* the relation to the absolute. However, as Rabjerg has argued, what is important in this context is the fact that Løgstrup's critique of Kierkegaard is directed towards a specific *reading* of Kierkegaard within *Tidehverv* that emerged in 1926 when Løgstrup was still a student at the University of Copenhagen (Rabjerg 2018, 89). One of its leading figures, theologian K. Olesen Larsen, used a very austere reading of Kierkegaard as a weapon against some other Christian movements in Denmark at the time, which he regarded as soft and pious (Rabjerg 2018, 164). Olesen Larsen thus read Kierkegaard as a strict proponent of Luther's idea of radical sin and condemned any form of Christianity that praises God's gift of love within finitude – God is absolutely transcendent, life on earth is total sin, and anyone thinking otherwise is a hypocrite and an idolater (Rabjerg 2018, 163). It is this austere conception of Kierkegaard that Løgstrup opposes, and in his preface to OK he hints very strongly at *Tidehverv*'s picture of Kierkegaard as the target for his critique. The reason why the book is not simply called 'Controverting K. Olesen Larsen' is, Rabjerg suggests, both the fact that Olesen Larsen (provocatively) saw himself as Kierkegaard's direct spokesman and the fact that Olesen Larsen had died a few years in advance of Løgstrup's publication (Rabjerg 2018, 165). Given this context, it is natural to

¹⁴ See also Pattison (2005, 115-26) and Ferreira (2001).

suppose that when Løgstrup criticises various Kierkegaardian ideas, it is very likely a critique directed at *Tidehverv*'s specific – and rather dark – reading of Kierkegaard to which he had himself been exposed throughout his youth and professional career at Aarhus University. I thus suggest that Pattison is right in drawing attention to other possible readings of Kierkegaard that are less radical and more sensitive to the complexity of Kierkegaard's idea of neighbour-love.

With this precaution in mind, I now turn to a couple of Kierkegaardian ideas, central to Løgstrup's criticism. Løgstrup agrees with Kierkegaard regarding the idea of existence as ethically qualified and the reality of an infinite and unconditional ethical demand, but he disagrees regarding the *content* and *accomplishment* of the demand. For Kierkegaard, Løgstrup claims, there is an absolute distinction between time and eternity, between absolute goodness (God) and totally sinful finitude, and nothing finite can be an expression of the fulfilment of the absolute demand; only in the entirely private relation to God is it possible for the individual to receive unconditional redemption, and, according to Løgstrup, the demand is ultimately a demand to die away from the finite world instead of a demand of love of the concrete neighbour (OK, 132). This is perhaps the most central idea Løgstrup rejects and he subsequently introduces the alternative idea that the accomplishment of the infinite ethical demand happens *in* the finite world by virtue of 'sovereign expressions of life' such as mercy, openness of speech, love, and trust. According to Løgstrup, these are specific *interpersonal* ethical phenomena through which unconditional goodness is accomplished, i.e., the *content* of the demand is the concrete love of the neighbour, and the *accomplishment* of redeeming love happens through the life-expressions. In this way Løgstrup moves away from the idea that the absolute good is *totally* transcendent and the subsequent conclusion that finitude is total sin. As Kees van Kooten Niekerk has pointed out, Løgstrup's point with the introduction of the life-expressions is the claim that living in finitude is not wrong (evil) in itself, but rather evil is living selfishly in it (Niekerk 2017, 190). Moral failure is ascribed solely to the human *will*, not finitude as such. With the introduction of the idea of 'sovereign expressions of life' (sometimes merely called 'life-expressions' or 'expressions of life'), Løgstrup claims to be able show how everyday empirical ethical phenomena express the actual realisation of unconditional goodness *in* life, i.e. not by virtue of the will, but by virtue of life itself.

The following analysis of the sovereign expressions of life corresponds with the first two focal points in the comparison of Løgstrup and Murdoch presented in the introduction, i.e., the two-way-movement and the ethical demand inherent in their moral realism. Regarding the first, the two-way-movement, Løgstrup continuously moves from empirical to metaphysical analysis in his examination of the ontological structure of experienced interpersonal

phenomena like trust, mercy, love, and the openness of speech. This approach is also characteristic of Murdoch, although the empirical phenomena she analyses are those of human consciousness rather than any given interpersonal phenomena. As we shall see, the difference in choice of empirical phenomena through which Murdoch and Løgstrup each claim to be able to assert the ontologically structured reality of the absolute and unconditional Good is closely connected to their pre-existing metaphysical framing of existence as such. This existing framing is related to the second focal point, the structure of their respective moral realism, which is meant to illuminate the metaphysical foundation of existence as ethically qualified and thus implicating a ubiquitous and absolute ethical demand (or appeal). In Løgstrup, a decisive point of departure in this regard is the strong emphasis on life as a *created* and *ongoing gift*. This was already hinted at above, where Løgstrup explained the ontological structure of trust as an ‘ongoing renewal of life’ (ED, 14). It is hard to deny the fact that we have not given ourselves life, and we cannot deny the reality of time, but, as we shall later see in comparison to Murdoch, the ongoing-gift-metaphor is not the only possible interpretation. Nevertheless, Løgstrup agrees with the Christian tradition at this point, and it is partly through the interpretation of life as an ongoing gift that the ethical demand receives its content¹⁵. This idea is already evident in ED:

First, it [the demand] receives its content from a fact, from a person to person relationship which can be demonstrated empirically, namely, that one person’s life is involved with the life of another person. The point of the demand is that one is to care for whatever in the other person’s life that involvement delivers into his or her hands. Second, the demand receives its one-sidedness from the understanding that a person’s life is an ongoing gift, so that we will never be in a position to demand something in return for what we do. That life has been given to us is something that cannot be demonstrated empirically, it can only be accepted in faith – or else denied (ED, 123).

The concept of sovereign expressions of life here provides the empirical parallel to the gift-metaphor that permeates Løgstrup’s thought. They are, however, not parallel to the ethical demand, but prior to it, in the sense that they cannot be applied by the human will as a response

¹⁵ Although Løgstrup follows the Christian tradition at this point, this should not be interpreted as a traditional dogmatic religious standpoint. According to Løgstrup, Christian truth must correspond with adequate metaphysical interpretation of the structure of existence (KH, 98). I return to Løgstrup’s subtle distinction between the metaphysical interpretation of life as a created gift and the possible religious interpretation thereof in part II on religious aspects of ethics.

to the demand – applicability would go against their nature as *created gifts*. Furthermore, Løgstrup’s affirmative ontology, in contrast to his negative anthropology, is no longer speculative; the sovereign expressions of life are un-willed positive ethical phenomena accomplished by life itself:

The Demand is unfulfillable, the sovereign expression of life is not accomplished by effort of the will to obey the demand. The demand is however accomplished, but spontaneously without being demanded. The demand arises when the sovereign expression of life is absent – but does not breed it; the demand demands to be superfluous. The demand corresponds with sin [evil will], the sovereign expression of life with freedom [unconditional goodness] (OK, 117-18, my transl.).

Løgstrup develops the concept of the life-expressions in contrast to phenomena he calls ‘encircling’ and ‘obsessive’ feelings (OK, 95). Obsessive feelings like jealousy and envy are characterised by their tendency to imprison the self. They fixate one’s thoughts on, e.g., the feeling of having been wronged, and they are thus uncreative, self-enclosing *reactions* through which a person batters on (self-assertive) resentment (OK, 97-98). In contrast to the obsessive and encircling feelings, the sovereign expressions of life are phenomena like trust, mercy, and the openness of speech, and they are characterized as *creative* forces in our interpersonal lives in the sense that they create and maintain the possibility of human flourishing in the first place (OK, 97-98). The creative force of the life-expressions is what enables us to be creative in our social lives, and it is through trust, mercy and the openness of speech that our actions can be other than mere reactions to our surroundings. In this specific regard, ‘creative’ connotes ‘creation’ rather than ‘creative imagination’, and in this sense it is through the life-expressions that we are able to create space for human flourishing, the goodness of which is always already defined by the goodness inherent in their accomplishment. In *Norm og Spontanitet* (Norm and Spontaneity) from 1972, we find an illustrative analysis of the openness of speech as a sovereign expression of life:

To speak is to speak openly. This is not something which the individual makes of speech, it [speech] is already open as an anonymous expression of life, so to speak. It is the sovereignty of speech to which we are subject in the moment we start speaking. Even in a situation where it is of desperate importance to mislead the other person, where the other person’s destructiveness is notorious and his games seen through to the bottom – even at this point it comes forward so that it simply feels unnatural not to speak openly (NS, 17, my transl.).

This is a model example of an analysis of the ontological structure of a sovereign expression of life. According to Løgstrup, these are given phenomena through which we intuitively grasp fundamental *moral* structures of human interdependency (our social lives) and also how we *ought* to accomplish our lives together. Niekerk has pointed out four central characteristics of the life-expressions, and in what follows I shall relate these to the fundamental gift-metaphor within which Løgstrup is working (Niekerk 2017, 191).

First of all, the life-expressions are *sovereign*. They are an expression of the sovereignty of a creative force preceding the fallen human will. Goodness is, strictly speaking, something we *receive*, and it is thus not at our immediate disposal. The life-expressions are also sovereign in the sense that they show me what is good or right; I intuitively grasp the goodness of trust and the openness of speech. The sovereignty of Good is thus a transcendent force, and the fundamental gift-metaphor further adds an ‘outside-in’ direction regarding its actualisation. As we shall see, this direction of movement is fundamentally different from that proposed in Murdoch’s Platonic account of the sovereignty of Good, and the difference between their Greek and Christian fundamental imagery at this point is, I suggest, perhaps the most decisive difference underlying all their other complex discussions, agreements and disagreements with various modern philosophical positions.

Secondly, the life-expressions are *spontaneous*, which is connected to creation as a continuous transcendent force, which spontaneously works *through* us and not by virtue of our will. Spontaneity has nothing to do with sudden impulsiveness but refers to the spontaneity of the creative force of sovereign, definitive goodness, as is the case in, e.g., the openness of speech. Spontaneity thus corresponds with the way the life-expressions naturally, immediately, and pre-reflexively, sustain our social lives.

Thirdly, the life-expressions are *definitive*, in the sense that they contain an inherent definition of what goodness is and therefore have a moral claim on us. The goodness connected to the openness of speech is always already inherent in the structure of the phenomenon itself, and it is thus through the life-expressions that we learn what goodness is and how the ethical demand should be fulfilled. This definitiveness is *given* and not at our disposal: “...the sovereign expression of life has a claim on us, and this it can have because it is definitive; it is not us who first create it from undefined mental abilities” (OK, 99, my transl.). Furthermore, it is also definitive in the sense that as soon as it is the slightest bit disrupted, it is destroyed. ‘Good’ is a definitive feature of the idea of mercy (which is not the same as claiming, on a different level, that mercy is always clever or rationally right): “Mercy is spontaneous because

the slightest disruption, the slightest calculation [...] destroys it completely and makes it the opposite of what it is, namely ruthlessness” (NS, 19, my transl.). This assertion implies, I suggest, that one can only have retrospective knowledge about the reality of the life-expressions; as soon as I reflect on the goodness of my action here and now I have already destroyed its goodness. One could of course then ask whether it is possible to have retrospective knowledge about one’s entire purity of heart in a past situation – a question Løgstrup however does not seem to ask himself.

Fourthly, the life-expressions are *unconditional*. This is connected to the quotation above, in which we see how the slightest implementation of an ulterior purpose destroys the life-expression by making it conditional on something outside itself. The accomplishment of trust and mercy is, Løgstrup suggests, unconditionally and inherently good, because this is how we naturally understand the nature of these phenomena, i.e. their *ontology*. This assertion is thus based on metaphysical interpretation of the *ontological* structure of the life-expressions, and, as mentioned previously in connection to Heidegger, it is in this regard important to distinguish Løgstrup’s ontological analysis of the life-expressions from scientific psychological analysis (Bugge 2009, 52). The ontology of the life-expressions thus suggests that they are unconditional because they do not need any *external* justification. In this regard, Niekerk has suggested an inconsistency in Løgstrup’s assertion that the life-expressions are unconditional. Niekerk refers to the fact that the life-expressions *are* in fact justified with reference to their proper goals, i.e. their maintenance of flourishing in human coexistence and communal life (Niekerk 2017, 196; 212 note 13). However, there is a danger here, I suggest – without implying that this is what Niekerk aims at – of reducing the life-expressions to explainable functions of our social lives. The life-expressions are not good because they sustain human flourishing, they are good as such, and it is through them that we learn that goodness as such is the accomplishment of neighbour-love. It is important to keep in mind, I suggest, that they are unconditional because they are not, strictly speaking, conditioned on *anything* else. In an example concerning disruption of compassion, Løgstrup says: “The foreign intention inevitably replaces compassion with a different motive, in this case an interest in stabilizing the prevailing order of society. From this empirical observation follows the metaphysical insight that it belongs to the nature of compassion to be unconditional” (ST, 271). A response to Niekerk’s concern could be that the accomplishment is not a legitimate or proper end of the life-expression. Instead, I suggest, the accomplishment is an inherent part of the life expression, and as such it is not an *end* but the inherent *finality* of the life expression, and this finality denotes the reality and unconditionality of goodness as such.

We have now seen how the sovereign expressions of life constitute the affirmative ontological counterpart to the negative Lutheran anthropology. As we have seen, the nature of goodness in Løgstrup is realised through interpersonal phenomena *prior* to the human will, and it is thus natural for him to interpret them as gifts that we must continuously *receive*. The redemption from selfishness is, according to this view, given from outside. A natural consequence is that the accomplishment of the ethical demand is also happening through a *surrender* of the will (OK, 116). The nature of this surrender is crucial however. It is a surrender which anticipates any ‘willed’ surrender (OK, 116). The metaphor is used several times by Løgstrup, and just as the phenomenon *trust* cannot be considered a virtue in Løgstrup, one should be careful with considering the surrendering of the will as virtuous. In his analysis of Løgstrup’s ethics, Wayne Martin suggests two possible coherent responses one could adopt when facing the ethical demand, one of them being a kind of Lutheran repentance, where one apologises not just for what one has *done* but also the imperfect fallen creature one *is*, which then leaves room for the gift of grace (Martin 2017, 345). Martin does not of course suggest that this is a way of fulfilling the demand. However, this kind of suggestion ultimately seems to me to miss the mark of Løgstrup’s endeavour, or at least to argue in the direction of some compatibility with more action-guiding moral philosophies. However, as Christoffersen has pointed out, what Løgstrup aims at is metaphysical *description* of our moral situation, and it thus seems inappropriate, I suggest, to go in the direction of trying to extract some possible practical advice for appropriate action from his moral philosophy (Christoffersen 2017, 180). The fulfilment happens *behind our will* through the sovereign expressions of life, and suggesting apologetic repentance as a coherent response is, strictly speaking, merely a variation of self-indulgence that furthermore removes the focus from Løgstrup’s main point: redemption (to speak with Luther) is already fulfilled in the *immediate communication* with the *other person*, and reflection on appropriate actions in specific situations is, again strictly speaking, always already being beyond the sovereign goodness Løgstrup tries to describe. I am aware that this argues in favour of reading Løgstrup more as a member of the metaphysically-oriented continental philosophical tradition rather than the Anglophone action-related tradition. This being said, it seems to me that the nature of the ontological interpretation of the sovereign expressions of life actually *does* suggest the placement of Løgstrup, despite his engagement with various analytic philosophers¹⁶, as a philosopher and theologian occupied with

¹⁶ See, e.g., his discussions of R.M. Hare and B. Russell (NS, 29-45; 64-68).

metaphysical *description* of morality rather than one concerned with working out what we should do.

As we shall see in the following, the surrender of the will is also a main theme in Murdoch, but because of the practical nature of her virtue-ethics and her different anthropology, this leaves room for active, willed, responses to the demand from the absolute Good.

Iris Murdoch

2.0 Love in Murdoch and Løgstrup

In order to depict Murdoch's contrastive position as concisely as possible, it will initially be necessary to point out a decisive difference in the understanding of the concept of love in the two thinkers, because of its important connection to their respective depictions of an absolute moral ground and the empirical moral phenomena in which they base their moral realism. Whereas Murdoch's concept of love connotes the Platonic *eros*-love, Løgstrup's conception works within the framework of Christian *agape*-love.¹⁷ At a first glance, one might easily conclude from the ethical universalism common to both thinkers that they are both working within the same metaphysical framework; they both seek to describe the moral situation of the human being within a framework of an ethically qualified metaphysical unity, and they both work with this absolute and unifying moral ground as something external to which the individual is naturally related (Schweiker 1996, 210). Nevertheless, as Schweiker has pointed out, although Christianity took over Plato's ethical universalism, the Christian concept of love is different in a very important way, which is ultimately related to their different cosmologies (Schweiker 1996, 210). As we saw in the above discussion, Løgstrup is anxious to show how absolute love can manifest itself *in* life by virtue of the life-expressions and thus to controvert, e.g., the Kierkegaardian idea of the absolute as *totally* transcendent. But goodness or love as such still remains something which the human being must *receive* from life itself, and it cannot be willed by the individual. Goodness is the 'outside-in' gift of grace inherent in the structure of life itself as an ongoing gift. Løgstrup's understanding of love thus works within the framework of Christian *agape*-love, which ultimately makes the concept of *virtue* irrelevant to him. Pure love or goodness can, according to Løgstrup, ultimately only be received in grace.

In contrast to Løgstrup, Murdoch's conception of love is based on the Platonic idea of *eros*-love, which denotes the active human striving for spiritual purification in the light of the Good. The concept of virtue is thus, in contrast to Løgstrup, of utmost importance to Murdoch,

¹⁷ I work here with the classical distinction between *eros* and *agape*. For a thorough investigation of the difference between the concept of *agape*-love and *eros*-love see, e.g., Nygren (1982 [1936-38]) and critical responses in Wingren (1954) and Tillich (1954). The interpretation of *eros* and *agape* and the relation between them has been disputed, but in this context I work with the distinction in its roughly outlined classical sense, i.e. Platonic *eros*-love as human love of the Good and Christian *agape*-love as the gift of grace from God. I use the classical distinction as an overall approach to interpretation and *only* in order to point out the important difference in the direction of movement of love and its connection to the idea of an absolute moral ground in Løgstrup and Murdoch.

and she consistently equates morality as such with virtue in her writings.¹⁸ Perfect goodness remains ultimately unattainable, but the continuous striving for it (*eros*) is nevertheless the task for the individual. Murdoch therefore emphasises the important difference between *Love* and *the Good*, which do not coincide in the same sense as they did in Løgstrup: “The concepts [Love and Good], even when the idea of love is purified, still play different roles. [...] Good is the magnetic centre towards which love [*eros*] naturally moves” (SoG, 100). The Good is what we should love, i.e. *we* are actively directed towards the Form of the Good, whereas the good is only ‘active’ as a magnetic force towards which we are drawn. In that sense, there are no gifts of grace in Murdoch’s conception of morality, and redemption is not selfless reception of immediacy, but selfless love of the real.

In MGM, Murdoch gives a concise description of her conception of the Platonic Forms, which also make up the background picture for the following analysis of human consciousness and its relation to the Good:

Plato’s Forms, as objects of moral desire, and principles of understanding, are to be thought of as active creative sources of energy in the world, but are mythically pictured as separate and transcendent; they cannot be relativized by being absorbed into (historical or psychoanalytical) transformations of existence. At a superficial level history fashions morals, at a deep level morals resist history. [...] The double structure of the Forms, being both immanent and transcendent, makes difficulties [...] for them in their logical role (as everyday universals), but in their moral role presents a comprehensible image, and indeed, as a concept of the divine, a familiar one. What is ideal is *active* in the imperfect life, and yet is also, and necessarily, separate from it. This separateness is connected with the possibility of freedom and spiritual movement and change in the life of the individual (MGM, 224).

Because this investigation concerns human morality, it is mainly the *moral* function of the forms I shall focus on in this context. It is important to notice how Murdoch ascribes a double structure to the Forms as being both immanent and transcendent, together with the fact that they are also *active* in imperfect life. Immediately, the picture resembles the one Løgstrup drew of the sovereign expressions of life. Trust, mercy and openness of speech also represented the perfect goodness as immanently active forces, realizing themselves in the immediate

¹⁸ This is perhaps most clearly formulated in her writings on – and re-writings of – Plato’s philosophy, which can be found, for example, in the essay collection *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) containing the essays ‘The Idea of Perfection’ (1962), ‘On ‘God’ and ‘Good’ (1969), and ‘The Sovereignty of Good’ (1967). The essay ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful revisited’ (1959) also contains important reflections on Platonic virtue and its relation to artistic practice.

relationship between human beings. The nature of the immanent representations of the Forms, however, is different from that of the life-expressions, because the Forms represent *virtues*, such as justice, patience, compassion, truthfulness, realism and courage (SoG, 87). Whereas Løgstrup referred to trust, mercy and the openness of speech as our immediate intuitions of moral goodness, Murdoch turns to *virtues* as the place where moral goodness resides: “We ordinarily conceive of and apprehend goodness in terms of virtues which belong to a continuous fabric of being” (IP, 29). As we shall see, the ontological structure Murdoch derives from the phenomenology of these moral concepts is not that they represent ongoing gifts of life, despite the fact that their inherent goodness is just as ‘given’ as Løgstrup’s life-expressions.¹⁹ Instead they are representations of endlessly perfectible virtues, which thus function as intuitive guidelines and pointers towards perfect morality (the ideal limit), i.e. the form of the Good (IP, 28). Because of the Platonic conception of the connection between ethics and metaphysics, she sees virtue as the endless task of carefully improving our vision and knowledge of the real, which can then subsequently guide our choices and actions. Murdoch’s emphasis on virtue also corresponds to her focus on the importance of spiritual exercise as an unavoidable aspect of moral philosophy, which contrasts with Løgstrup’s focus on metaphysical *description* alone (Tracy 1996, 69-75; Antonaccio 2012, 126-127).

2.1 Consciousness as the Basis for Moral Enquiry

In contrast to Løgstrup, Murdoch insists that human *consciousness* constitutes the basis for moral enquiry. As Antonaccio and Taylor have pointed out, this assertion is connected to her retrieval of the Platonic insight that what we *do* is conditioned by what we can *see*, i.e., our actions are guided by the direction of our love and attention (Antonaccio 2012, 28; Taylor 1989, 84). Murdoch is thus critical of her contemporary analytical philosophical colleagues within the field of ethics, who seem to focus strictly on rational reflection on universal rules for action. Instead, she suggests consciousness as the natural starting point for moral enquiry: “I want there to be a discussable problem of consciousness, because I want to talk about consciousness or self-being as the fundamental mode or form of moral being [...] as distinguished from conceptions depending solely upon choice, will and action” (MGM, 171). As we shall see, her rejection of exclusively rule-based moral philosophies is thus different

¹⁹ David Tracy has argued that the Platonic conception of the Good also contains a gift-metaphor, which has gained much less attention than the idea of the Good as a magnet for human love (Tracy 1996, 75; see also Marion 1991). In this context, however, I focus on Murdoch’s reading of the Good as the distinct and detached object for human love (eros) (SoG, 100).

from Løgstrup's in the sense that she does not regard them as *substitutes* for morality. According to Murdoch, the problem is rather their restriction of the field of ethics – moral theory *can* involve rational deliberation on rules for action, but such deliberation must be based on the insight that rationality cannot be the foundation of morality. As Taylor has shown thoroughly in *Sources of the Self* – with explicit reference to Murdoch – human morality cannot be based on logic, science or rationality, but instead on the fundamental insight that to be a human being is to be naturally directed towards an idea of some 'higher good' (Taylor 1989, 3).

In what follows, I shall shed light on how Murdoch gives reasons for this assertion by analysing consciousness on two different levels which, according to Murdoch, both support the idea that the inner quality of consciousness must be the starting point for moral philosophy and how this quality is related to the metaphysical (Platonic) idea of the Good (Antonaccio 2012, 64-65). In my analysis I follow the strategy presented in the introduction, and I shall thus draw attention throughout to the two-way-movement between metaphysics and empiricism on the one hand, and on the other, relate this to the nature of Murdoch's moral realism and its connection to an inherent moral demand to the individual.

The first aspect is the particularizing aspect of consciousness. Murdoch is anxious to show how the constant discriminations of perceptions in consciousness are morally qualified. We constantly make discriminations within the muddle of our perceptions and order them through normative concepts such as good, bad, true, false, better, and worse, and on a fundamental level our understanding of such concepts is a result of the depth and complexity of individually experienced contexts (IP, 37). In this sense, our discriminations are always already conditioned by what we can actually *see*, and Murdoch thus argues that there is a natural truth-seeking aspect of consciousness, which evaluates its perceptions with regard to what is *real* (IP, 36). 'Reality' is however not a neutral word and covers more than the scientific use of the term, to which we have grown so accustomed in the modern world. In Murdoch, reality is a *normative* concept in a Platonic sense, and the truth-seeking aspect inherent in the particularizing aspect of consciousness thus corresponds with the idea that the natural human striving for knowledge of reality is a *moral* pilgrimage from appearance to reality, which is guided by the metaphysical idea of perfect vision (Antonaccio 2012, 65).

The second aspect of consciousness regards its natural tendency to picture the surrounding world as consisting in ordered, meaningful *unities*. We naturally piece together the fragments we encounter on our way into enclosed unities, e.g., narratives about persons, political systems, the order of nature. In accordance with the first aspect, this unifying aspect

is also fundamentally *morally* qualified, and it corresponds with the unifying quality of the Form of the Good. Our search for unity is, Murdoch suggests, always already a search for *moral* unity, because morality is the only real and lasting unity (form) in our otherwise chancy and contingent existence (Antonaccio 2012, 65).

2.2 *The Particularizing Aspect of Consciousness*

I begin by giving an account of the particularizing aspect of consciousness. In this part I aim to analyse Murdoch's claim that the continuous private discriminations and descriptions of reality within consciousness are a fundamental aspect of human morality and how this particularizing function can be read within a broader Platonic conception of 'true knowledge' as guided by the idea of perfect virtue. As we shall see, the moral qualification of the basic workings of consciousness is what ultimately makes Murdoch reject (quasi)-scientific conceptions of the basic structure of consciousness – in this context exemplified by her rejection of Stuart Hampshire's non-cognitivism and Husserl's attempt at a scientific description of consciousness. The moral qualification of the 'inner workings' of consciousness means that it is the ongoing presence of viscous imaginations, words and feelings within our minds which have a certain normative quality and on a fundamental level constitutes the reality we can *see*, and thus also what we can *do* (IP, 36-37). Murdoch rejects any rational or scientific foundation of morality that, according to her, views reality as a 'neutral world of facts' and moral activity as based in a freely and rationally choosing will. She claims to find this kind of segregation of fact and value in various, otherwise very different, modern philosophers, such as Kant, Wittgenstein, Hume and Hampshire (MGM, 50-55; IP, 4). In these philosophies, morality is, Murdoch contends, ultimately restricted to the workings of the *will* through its relation to a value-neutral external reality (MGM, 50-55).

I shall now give a short account of Murdoch's critical depiction of this view of human morality in order to clarify her own rival picture. In the essay *The Idea of Perfection*, Murdoch puts forward perhaps her most famous example of the changing relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, which illustrates her idea that any moral theory must take the inner workings of consciousness into account as a serious place to look for moral content (IP, 16-17). The essay also serves to reject the idea that the concept 'good' is a function of the will, which regrettably, according to Murdoch, results in the view that morality is merely a reflection of external willed activities and thus that the task for moral philosophy should be constructing normative theories about rational 'public rules' for conduct (IP, 10; MGM, 166). Murdoch

takes Hampshire's non-cognitivist position as a typical example of the British moral philosophy of the time (IP, 6). Her argument is extensive and complicated, and I shall thus only point out the most important aspects that make up the ideal moral agent in Hampshire, who, despite fundamental differences with the above-mentioned philosophers, shares the strong emphasis on rationality, will and action.²⁰ First of all, reality is described as the external (public) existence of 'objects', which are knowable by any rational being, and the human being is thus a rationally capable object that moves among other objects in a 'continuous flow of intention [will] into action [reality]' (IP, 4). This means that activity is real only as external instances of moving (doing) something in the public world, and furthermore that thoughts are only 'real' if they are directly expressed through an external action. Thoughts in themselves cannot do anything, and thus they are not, strictly speaking, real. I am thus only morally responsible for what I *do*, and not for the quality of my thoughts, i.e. what I can *see*. Individual identity is thus restricted to the doings of the will (IP, 5). Secondly, the ideal moral agent is pictured as 'the ideally rational man', who aims for clear, impersonal and objective knowledge of the situation before the personal will freely chooses among as many possibilities as possible (IP, 39). This ideal agent would thus have full objective knowledge of all features of the situation, a clear conceptualization of all his possibilities for action, and of all his dispositions and intentions, before he chooses what is 'right' or 'good' to do (which seems to be, Hampshire acknowledges, impossible). Implied in this view is that the will and reason (rational knowledge) are separated in the moral agent. Knowledge is neutral description of the situation in ordinary and commonly accessible terms, and moral concepts refer only to the freely chosen actions of the will. Actions are then judged as 'good', 'wrong', 'courageous' etc. with reference to the *objective* (and thus rationally conceivable) outcome of the action. Thus, Murdoch concludes: "Our hero aims at being a 'realist' and regards sincerity as the fundamental and perhaps the only virtue" (IP, 8).

This picture, however, cannot make up an adequate theory of moral agency, according to Murdoch, and in what follows I shall show how Murdoch depicts moral goodness, not as a function of the will, but as a result of the quality and depth of our *vision* of reality, which is

²⁰ This is thus not a thorough philosophical engagement with Hampshire's philosophy or how Murdoch's rejection of his position relates to the entire analytical philosophical tradition. In this context I merely aim to show Murdoch's rejection of a segregation of fact and value to illuminate her claim that description is always already normative, and that morality is connected to our inner (linguistic, pictorial, emotional) 'visualisations' of reality. For a more thorough analysis of Murdoch's engagement with contemporary British philosophy see, e.g., Bagnoli (2011).

constantly interpreted and reinterpreted (with more or less care and love) in our continuous value-laden attempts to understand and describe the reality in which we act.

Murdoch's counter-example to the sincere, neutral and rational moral agent concerns the mother-in-law *M* and her daughter-in-law *D*, and it goes as follows: *M* has mixed feelings about *D*, whom she regards as good-hearted, but also simple, brusque, tiresomely juvenile etc. *M* cannot help feeling that her son has married beneath him. However, and this is Murdoch's point, *M* does not in any way *show* her dissatisfaction with *D*. *M* behaves beautifully to *D* and does not let anybody know about her true feelings. What Murdoch is anxious to show is the fact that what is 'happening' is happening entirely in *M*'s mind (*D* could as well have died). Time passes, and Murdoch now suggests two possible developments in *M*'s view on *D*. In the first scenario *M* settles in some kind of bitterness over *D*, keeping a fixed picture of her as a silly and simple girl. But this is not the *M* of Murdoch's example: "...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" (IP, 17). *M* critically reflects on her own judgment of *D*, and tries to attend to her without prejudice, snobbishness or jealousy. Now *M*'s view on *D* gradually changes, and *M* starts seeing *D* in a new light: not noisy but gay, not undignified but spontaneous, etc. By attending to *D* in a just and caring manner, stripped from egoistic prejudice, *M* comes closer to a true understanding of *D*.

This picture is strikingly different from the purely rational agent. Following the two aspects mentioned in connection with Murdoch's depiction of Hampshire's moral agent, I shall now illuminate her claim that her own moral agent (*M*) can function as a better picture of the fundamental structure of human morality. Murdoch is anxious to show how the inner workings of consciousness is *real* moral activity. This point is also expressed in MGM:

It is impossible to describe mind philosophically without including its moral mobility, the sense in which any situation is individualised by being pierced by moral considerations, by being given a particular moral colour or orientation. [...] Consciousness au fond and ab initio must contain an element of truth-seeking, through which it is also evaluated (MGM, 241).

Regarding Murdoch's emphasis on the importance of the evaluative process in the particular consciousness, I follow the insights of philosopher Julia Driver, who has suggested a moderate reading of Murdoch's strong emphasis on 'inner qualities' of consciousness. There has been a tendency to read Murdoch as a substantive moral *particularist*, i.e. as holding the view that moral judgements are *entirely* based on the careful scrutiny of particular, context-based

phenomena (Driver 2011, 296). Instead Driver draws attention to the important fact that although Murdoch wants to draw attention to the importance of particular human experience, she does not want to altogether reject the function of external aspects of morality – including both straight-forward rules for action, but also, and very importantly, metaphysical ideas such as the Good and Love (Driver 2011, 305). I suggest that for Murdoch, as well as for Løgstrup, it is rather a fundamental debate about what constitutes the basis for morality than it is an attempt to reject any reflection on public (rational) rules as relevant for moral philosophy (IP, 25).

The first point in the critique of Hampshire's non-cognitivism corresponds with the first of two points Murdoch wants to defend in IP: the importance of individual reality. Murdoch's example of M and D suggests that we need a different conception of reality and the individual's place in it, if the example is to make any sense (which she believes it does). When M approaches D she does not do this with 'neutral, scientific objectivity', and the concepts with which she describes her cannot be exhaustively described according to rational and scientific prescripts (Bagnoli 2011, 204-5). The normative words with which she describes D are not derived from a 'open' and common-sense set of neutral and rational descriptions of what it means to be 'juvenile', 'simple', or 'good-hearted'. As Bagnoli has suggested, Murdoch's point is in contrast that moral concepts are much more deep, private, and complex in character, because they are always already tied to the history of individual contexts of inexhaustible complexity (Bagnoli 2011, 201). The understanding of, for example, the concept 'repentance' is tied to the history of the individual, and it might mean something very different at different times in our lives (IP, 25). Murdoch thus draws on a Hegelian insight that the content of abstract universals, e.g., courage, changes over time as they are applied by different people in different contexts. They are enriched and changed by their concrete embodiments (Bagnoli 2011, 222). In IP, Murdoch suggests that moral concepts should be treated as concrete universals, because the variety of their meaning is endless (IP 29). It is however important to notice that this does not speak in favour of an elimination of universal moral concepts. Instead, Murdoch points to the fact that all universals gain their concrete content from creatively interpreting individuals in specific historical contexts (Bagnoli 2011, 223). In this way, M's descriptions of D are tied to M's individual history and her individually interpreted conception of the world. Our continuous evaluations and re-evaluations are thus *individualised* and given a specific moral 'colour'. They receive this individualisation from our continuous individual *attentive looking* (or lack of the same) at the world, and attention is never neutral: "...attention 'introduces' value into the world which we confront. We have already partly willed our world when we come to

look at it; and we must admit moral responsibility for this ‘fabricated’ world, however difficult it may be to control the process of fabrication” (DPR, 201). The progressive nature of private individual *outlook* thus contrasts with the scientific idea of openness and rationality as constituents for ‘reality’:

Moral language, which relates to a reality infinitely more complex than that of science, is often unavoidably idiosyncratic and inaccessible. Words are the most subtle symbols which we possess and our human fabric depends on them. [...] We are men and we are moral agents before we are scientists, and the place for science in human life must be discussed in words (IP, 33).

A consequence of this view is that our moral responsibility is connected to the quality of our individual, continuously changing, ‘fabric of being’, through which we see the world. Morality is thus primarily connected to the quality of our *vision* instead of the momentary acts of the will. ‘We have already willed our world’ further suggests that the will is much more closely entangled with an individual outlook, and ‘choice’ is much less a sudden force of the ‘external’ will. As we see in the case of M, moral change is not a sudden reorientation of the will, but her slow and careful reorientation of the *quality* of the dense structure of her entire outlook – she struggles to see D clearly in a ‘just and loving’ light rather than from her snobbish and narrow-minded point of departure (IP, 17; 23). In this regard it is important to emphasise the conception of clarity inherent in the example with M and D. In the example, there was an important qualification of clarity (objectivity) as the surrender of judgements biased by selfishness (jealousy, snobbishness). What made M’s position morally criticisable was thus not its (possible) rational inconsistency but its *selfish* nature. Moral failure in Murdoch is thus qualified as selfish distortion of external reality and the inability to see beyond the fabric of our own world (Bagnoli 2011, 218). What makes M’s struggle a difficult and a *moral* one is the complicated task of attending to – and understanding – a reality which lies beyond her own personally knitted conception of the world. In this way, truth and objectivity is reality freed from selfish distortions and cannot be associated with seeing clearly in a scientific sense (there is no such ‘objective’ truth) (IP, 29). In DPR, Murdoch pictures a situation such as M’s in this way: “We are obscure to ourselves because the world we see already contains our values and we may not be aware of the slow delicate processes of imagination and will which have put those values there” (DPR, 200).

Finally, this conception of morality is closely related to the second central point in IP: the idea of moral perfection. M's attempt to see D justly and lovingly represents virtuousness as an endless striving for understanding individual reality outside oneself: "...the central concept of morality is 'the individual' thought of as knowable by love" (IP, 29). M's attempt to see D justly and lovingly is an attempt to see reality without the distortions of selfish fear and ignorance. This is the way in which virtuousness in Murdoch is a continuous process of 'unselfing' by directing imagination towards what is real and away from 'false pictures' that serve as consolations for the habitually thinking and often fearful self (Antonaccio 2012, 142).

2.3 Platonic Anthropology

The above analysis also indicates an important difference between Murdoch's and Løgstrup's anthropologies, which I shall briefly touch upon. In an article on Løgstrup, Hans Fink points out that Løgstrup and Murdoch would agree that the enemy in our moral lives is egoism (Fink 2017, 68). Fink is perfectly right in this, but a clarification of what they mean by 'egoism' is needed, I contend. As we have seen earlier, Løgstrup pictures egoism as the evil will of the human being, and in this way goodness cannot be *willed* by the individual, but must take the will 'aback' in terms of the life-expression.

Murdoch, on the other hand, is anxious to move away from the traditional focus on the will in moral philosophy, and instead she adopts the Platonic notion of *vision*. Thus, she sees the moral agent as a creative evaluator who constantly pictures his surrounding world, however often in a false and self-protective manner: "The psyche is a historically determined individual, relentlessly looking after itself. [...] 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" (SoG, 76-77). This characterization of the self as falsifying (daydreaming) and fearful corresponds to Murdoch's analysis of evil as the result of a 'depraved vision' (MGM, 103). In this way, it is not the *will* that is evil, it is *ignorance*, which can, however, according to the above picture of M, be purified through virtuous attention. Evil is thus much more entangled with the direction of our attention than with our will, and goodness is not something which takes the will aback, but the active purification of desires: "The good (better) man is *liberated* from selfish fantasy, can see himself as others see him, imagine the needs of other people, love unselfishly, lucidly envisage and desire what is truly valuable. This is the ideal picture" (MGM, 331).

2.4 *The Unifying Aspect of Consciousness*

We have now seen Murdoch's account of how our particularizing encounter with empirical reality is morally qualified, and we have seen how the ideal moral agent attends to reality freed from the ego and in a just and loving (compassionate) manner. But our encounter with the world is not merely a moment-to-moment undertaking of constant discrimination between true and false. According to Murdoch, there is a second aspect of consciousness, which is connected to our inescapable creative tendency to picture ourselves as whole persons who are parts of larger contexts with some degree of continuity and order (MGM, 1). Throughout history, philosophers have tried to describe the metaphysical precondition for our experience of the world as a continuous and unified whole, and Murdoch often refers to Kant's idealism or Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness as alternative, but nevertheless insufficient, attempts at finding such a precondition. However, as Schweiker and Antonaccio have suggested, Murdoch nevertheless draws on Kant's idea that the human mind is a synthetic activity with a natural metaphysical 'craving', but then ultimately rejects his assumption that Reason makes up the unifying aspect of human existence (Schweiker 1996, 225; Antonaccio 2012, 65). In contrast to Kant, Murdoch sees metaphysics as a fundamental *artistic* impulse – we use our imagination to join the world, and we experience goodness when we do this in accordance with truth, that is, accurately, justly, and lovingly (SoG, 88). As we shall see, Murdoch thus merges the Kantian idea of metaphysical moral unity with the Platonic idea of virtuousness as striving for perfect vision of the real. In this way, the idea of the Good functions as a transcendental unifier of human experience as such, and it is thus *qua* the Good as a transcendental aspect of human consciousness that human existence is unified as a morally qualified whole.

In the following analysis I begin by giving a short account of an important metaphysical precondition in Murdoch and of how this is related to the two aspects of consciousness. This establishes an important background for the subsequent analysis of the Good as a transcendental aspect of consciousness. The analysis of the unifying aspect of consciousness also corresponds with the first focal point presented in the introduction, namely the movement between empirical and metaphysical analysis. Where Løgstrup focused on the life-expressions, Murdoch instead focuses on practical examples of *virtue*, which she interprets as the empirical experience that points in the direction of a unifying, absolute moral ground. Finally, as was the case in Løgstrup, Murdoch's choice of empirical point of departure is also closely connected to her metaphysical background picture, which is related to the second focal point presented in

the introduction: the nature of their respective moral realism and its implication of a ubiquitous moral demand – life, in terms of external reality, always already has a moral claim on us.

The important metaphysical precondition for this context is Murdoch's revival of the Greek perspective which asserts that existence is fundamentally pointless and has no external point or purpose (Gk. *τελος*). This is the foundation of Greek cosmology, to which the Christian idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is foreign, and there is thus no conception of the Good (God) as continuously sustaining existence. In the second part of the thesis I further elaborate what I contend to be the important significance the idea of creation has for Løgstrup's and Murdoch's conceptions of morality. For this context, however, it is sufficient to remain focused on Murdoch's assumption that existence has no extrinsic purpose – it is as such pointless, and, more importantly, there is no idea of a creative force of renewal of life, as we saw in Løgstrup's life-expressions. Whereas Løgstrup's analysis of negative and affirmative ontology suggests that ultimately none of them can be rationally explained, and one must at this point choose a standpoint, it might seem as if Murdoch chooses the opposite standpoint and that her ontology therefore cannot, strictly speaking, be categorized as affirmative in Løgstrup's use of the term. Murdoch puts it thus: "That human life has no external point or *τελος* is a view as difficult to argue as its opposite, and I shall simply assert it. [...] We are what we seem to be, transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance" (SoG, 77). And later: "...the world is aimless, chancy, huge, and we are blinded by self" (SoG, 97). Initially, this statement resembles the negative ontologies of existentialism and science that Løgstrup rejected. However, what qualifies Murdoch's position as affirmative ontology, I suggest, is her insistence that although there might not be a metaphysical moral unity in the traditional Christian sense, there in fact *is* a different kind of moral unity in existence, despite its evident pointlessness:

...there is, in my view, no God in the traditional sense of that term; and the traditional sense is perhaps the only sense. [...] Equally the various metaphysical substitutes for God – Reason, Science, History – are false deities. [...] And if there is any kind of sense or unity in human life, and the dream of this does not cease to haunt us, it is of some other kind and must be sought within a *human experience* which has nothing outside it (SoG, 77, my emphasis).

Because of the aimlessness and contingency of the world, it is impossible to derive an idea of any ongoing gift of love; the universe is not concerned with us, and love and goodness are *human* accomplishments. It is possible, however, Murdoch contends, to derive an idea of a unifying conception of goodness towards which the human consciousness as a unified whole

is always already naturally directed, despite the simultaneous experience of the world's chancy and contingent particularity. As we have already partly seen regarding the particularizing aspect of consciousness, this directedness is evident from our experience of the value of *virtue*, which points at the curious juxtaposition of pointlessness and value in the idea of the Good – virtue simply is good in itself without any point or purpose (SoG, 85). Murdoch is thus anxious to retain the tension, inherent in human existence, between unity and fragmentation, our sense of ourselves and our world as ‘whole’ and yet also, at times, inexplicably fragmented and chaotic (Antonaccio 1996, 128). This tension between unification and fragmentation in consciousness is also reflected in the virtuous agent. We have seen how Murdoch emphasises the fragmented and contingent status of reality by suggesting that the concepts we apply to it should be understood as concrete universals, picturing the inexhaustible complexity and contingency of individual reality. The virtuous agent is able to discriminate and attend carefully to the muddled and contingent individual reality of the other (recall the mother-in-law). However, there is yet another feature of the attention in the virtuous agent, namely, its *form*, i.e. the inevitable creation of a unified picture and a unified understanding of reality. M attends to D through a just and loving gaze, which means that she *unifies* her attention by trying to join the parts into a *true* picture of reality. The justice and love with which she attends to D emphasise the moral qualification of truth and, as shown above, how truth is connected to goodness. M's unified picture, Murdoch suggests, is thus related to the idea that consciousness as a *whole* is fundamentally unified by the idea of the Good as perfect reality (truth), that is, on a fundamental level, we see things in the light of the sovereign Good up against which we always already evaluate the world we encounter (MGM, 427; Antonaccio 2012, 67). It is this assumption that I shall now explore.

2.5 The transcendent Good as a Transcendental Aspect of Consciousness

In this section, I explore how Murdoch asserts the reality of an absolute moral ground as the fundamental unifier of human experience by combining a ‘logical’ transcendental argument about the sovereignty of Good with an appeal to everyday human experience of the goodness of virtue. In contrast to Løgstrup's metaphysics, this assertion is based on a unified metaphysical interpretation of our experience of the value of *virtue*. Virtues do not merely make up single instances of goodness; they point at morality as an ontological structure of human existence: “The idea of perfection haunts all our activity, and we are well aware of how

we try to blot it out. Here we see how it matters to talk or think about ‘the Good’ or ‘virtue’ as something unitary, rather than just instancing cases of admirable conduct” (MGM, 428).

However, Murdoch suggests, it is very important to consider carefully how one wants to investigate the idea of metaphysical unity, because metaphysical deliberation easily slips into inadequate speculation and inappropriate attempts at finding quasi-scientific or quasi-literal ‘deep’ structures of existence (MGM, 236). This awareness is a crucial similarity between Løgstrup and Murdoch, who both insist that metaphysics is careful *interpretation* of certain aspects of human life that seem to point in a certain direction. Murdoch puts it in this way: “...what is ‘deep’ in philosophy is not something literal or quasi-factual or quasi-scientific. A careful explicit use of metaphor, often instinctive, is in place. [...] Formal philosophy can come only so far, and after that can only point (MGM, 236). This assumption further stresses Murdoch’s claim that any unifying aspect of existence must be sought within human experience which has ‘nothing outside it’ – metaphysics is a result of *human* experience and human pictures thereof (SoG, 77). It will however be clear from the following that this does not lead to a Cartesian or idealist standpoint in Murdoch, but, as Tracy has emphasised, it rather indicates a strong emphasis on the importance of avoiding any onto-theological connotations to the Platonic notion of the Good (Tracy 1996, 62).

With this in mind, I now turn to Murdoch’s argument about the nature of the Good and its connection to human consciousness, which is perhaps most clearly formulated in her Platonic re-reading of St. Anselm’s classical ‘Ontological Proof of God’s Existence’ (MGM, 391). In the re-reading, Murdoch rejects the theism ascribed to the Christian God, and by replacing God with Good, she retains what she claims to be the deep meaning of the Proof and what the old God symbolised: the unique and necessary status of moral value in human life (MGM, 396). This has of course been criticised by Christian theologians, who do not agree that Good symbolises everything the old God stood for. Schweiker has in this regard made an important point concerning the value of the individual, which I return to below (Schweiker 1996, 209). Firstly, however, I give a short outline of the content of the original proof in order then to give an account of how it contains two different aspects – one empirical and one transcendental – and how Murdoch re-interprets these into a Platonic conception of the Good as the basic and unifying aspect of human consciousness.

The first part of the Proof is Anselm's idea of God as "...the most real Being, than which nothing greater [or more perfect] can be conceived" (MGM, 393).²¹ Inherent in this formulation lies the second assumption that if such a Being can be conceived of in the understanding (consciousness), it must also exist in reality. This led to the well-known objection stated by the contemporary monk Gaunilo, and later by Kant, that existence is not a predicate one can add to a mental concept one happens to have (MGM, 394). In Anselm's reply to this objection he makes two crucial points. The first is empirical and refers to our experience of morality as involving degrees of perfection; from our experience of what is less good we can have an understanding of what is perfectly good, which is the idea of God as the Being of which nothing greater can be conceived (MGM, 394). The second point has a transcendental character and responds more directly to Kant's and Gaunilo's objections that a thought concept (a thought essence) does not necessarily exist in reality. In this regard, Anselm makes an important distinction between the concept of God and all other concepts by asserting that God, unlike all other concepts, represents a non-contingent and non-particular Being whose non-existence it would be impossible to conceive of (MGM, 394). The idea that God can be known through our moral experience of what is good and the idea that God is a necessary reality are thus, Murdoch suggests, the two basic elements in Anselm's Proof. In her interpretation of the Proof, Murdoch now draws attention to the significance of these two points in Anselm's reply and argues that the same can be said about Plato's concept of Good. She furthermore emphasises the importance of the empirical support of the transcendental aspect, which prevents the Proof from being an entirely speculative and unrealistic assertion.

Regarding the empirical point, Murdoch suggests that the idea of God is connected to an omnipresent idea of *moral* perfection, because we naturally compare lower degrees of goodness to an idea of perfection in our continuous encounter with the world – this regarding both the particularizing and unifying workings of consciousness. The ubiquity of morality is what we saw in the case of M and what we all continually experience when we meet a work of art, a person, a text, etc. We try to understand in order to gain a truthful picture of what we see, and we judge the text and the work of art from its ability to join a truthful picture of what it wants to show. The good artist is thus virtuous in the sense that she or he has *seen* something and is able to picture it truthfully (SoG, 84). Throughout her writings Murdoch uses the good artist as an example of the ideal virtuous agent, and she pictures human beings with reference

²¹ Although Murdoch's translation differs slightly, I assume she refers to paragraph II in the *Proslogium* where it says "...we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" (Anselm 1926 [1077-78]).

to the fact that ‘we are all artists’ who creatively scrutinize and unify the reality we meet – more or less realistically (MGM, 334). The good artist exemplifies virtuousness because the beauty of good art resembles moral goodness in the sense that it exemplifies love of the real regarding both *content* and *form*. The good artist is able to scrutinize and attend to the inexhaustible reality of the irreducible individuality of the world, and at the same time look at it in a selfless, just and truthful way, that is, he sees it in the light of the Good: “The realism of a great artist is not a photographic realism, it is essentially both pity and justice” (SoG, 85). Elsewhere Murdoch suggests that this is why we primarily remember the complex nature of the *characters* and their worlds (and not the author) in Tolstoy’s great novels, because he succeeds in seeing them ‘as they are’ and portraying them with a just respect for their individuality (SBR, 276). What Murdoch is anxious to do is thus to incorporate both the particularizing and unifying aspects of consciousness in Anselm’s empirical claim about God’s ubiquity in human experience, which she then wants to transform into a unified idea of the Good. In the transformation of God to Good, Murdoch follows Plato’s parable of the Cave in the *Republic* in order to show how all human consciousness is always already engaged in this kind of (more or less successful) unifying artistic practice, because of its preconditioned *orientation* towards an idea of the perfect Good. As is the case of the escaping prisoner in cave, we naturally experience our lives, Murdoch suggests, as a truth-seeking journey, and we naturally connect goodness to the ability to see what is real:

We ‘see’ God through the morally good things of the world, through our (moral) perception of what is beautiful and holy, through our ability to distinguish good and evil [...H]e exists necessarily, we conceive of him by noticing *degrees of goodness*, which we see in ourselves and in all the world which is a shadow of God (MGM, 396).

This is thus an empirical argument from our *experience* of morality, which suggests that the whole of consciousness is structured around the idea of the Good as perfect reality – either as a movement towards or away from Good (Antonaccio 2012, 112).

As mentioned above, the empirical argument functions as a support for the transcendental argument. Regarding the transcendental aspect, Murdoch stresses the importance of the assertion that God is a *necessary*, non-contingent and non-particular Being. This means that God cannot be thought of as an *object* among other objects, but must nevertheless be understood as a necessary *reality*. In an article on Murdoch’s Platonism, Tracy draws attention to the fact that this conception of God makes it natural for Murdoch to read the

Proof in a Platonic and thus non-theistic sense as the Good ‘beyond being’ (MGM, 399; Tracy 1996, 56). God can thus be transformed into a necessary conception of omnipresent and perfect goodness beyond being, which we conceive of through our encounter with external reality. In Plato, Murdoch argues, the Good is beyond any personal God and is instead mythically pictured as the sun in the parable of the sun in the *Republic*. The sun is what enables us to see in the first place, but we are blinded when we try to look directly at it. Furthermore, the Good is pictured as an omnipresent *magnetic* power that draws human love (eros) towards its centre (MGM, 399)²². This is a crucial difference to Løgstrup’s idea of goodness as a gift, and, I suggest, it stresses the importance of the above-mentioned distinction between goodness and love in the two thinkers and its connection to the movement of direction regarding the accomplishment of moral goodness. I return to this connection below in the analysis of the moral demand in Murdoch.

For now I continue with Murdoch’s picture of the Good as connected to the unifying aspect of consciousness. The picture is, of course (Murdoch stresses), a *mythical* picture, which is supposed to show how the *idea* of the Good is the separate and absolutely transcendent precondition for our ability to see the world in the first place (MGM, 399). As Antonaccio has pointed out, this argument is thus an argument for the Good as a transcendental aspect located within human consciousness (Antonaccio 2012, 111). We always already see the world in the light of the Good, that is with constant reference to it, and this is what makes the concept of Good a necessary and unifying aspect of human existence. Reality is, *ipso facto*, *moral* reality: “Others who feel that perhaps the Proof proves something, but not any sort of God, might return to Plato and claim some uniquely necessary status for moral value as something (uniquely) impossible to be thought away from human experience [...]” (MGM, 396). The Good thus makes up a necessary precondition of human life, Murdoch suggests, because we cannot think away our experience of an inherent moral orientation if we reflect upon or the structure of human experience. This picture corresponds with the idea cited above of the Forms as separate (transcendent) and at the same time immanent magnetic forces towards which we strive. We see the goodness of virtuous people and of good art *in* life, but we cannot see the background against which they are measured. We cannot, Murdoch contends, perceive perfection in our ‘fallen’ world – we are always drawn further beyond by the magnetic Good that cannot be seen, for it is not there as a real ‘entity’ beyond – the Good remains an ‘edifying or hermeneutic ‘as

²² As Tracy remarks, Murdoch’s reading of the Good as a *magnetic* power ‘beyond being’ is not identical with other contemporary readings of Plato’s Good as beyond being, such as in Emmanuel Levinas or Jean-Luc Marion, who also perceive of Good as a gift (Tracy 1996, 57).

if” (MGM, 402). The Good is thus separate as a *human idea*, but not as an actual ‘place’ like the place of God in the traditional Christian sense of an ‘elsewhere’ (MGM, 399). This is the sense in which any idea of moral unity in existence must be found within a *human* experience, which nevertheless points beyond the limits of what is humanly possible. Plato’s metaphysical myths point in the direction of our experienced sense of moral unity, but as mythical ideas they do not disturb the coexisting reality of an aimless, contingent, and as such pointless world. ‘The Whole is false’ and ‘our world is irreducibly contingent’, Murdoch asserts (MGM, 370). Our sense of unity and contingency exist side by side, and the only real unifying force in existence is the light of the Good: “The only thing which is of real importance is the ability to see it all clearly and respond to it justly which is inseparable from virtue” (SoG, 85). Unity is not any material connection between objects; real unity is attention in the light of truth.

We have now seen how Murdoch works within the framework of a two-way movement between metaphysics and empiricism in a very different way to Løgstrup. Unity is a human accomplishment in Murdoch, which is nevertheless subordinate to the Good as the ideal for a truthful vision of reality. Our moral world is thus not unified through the givenness of love through life-expressions but through the Good as a moral ideal towards which we must strive.

We shall now examine some implications of the empirical and metaphysical aspect of Murdoch’s Proof, which are connected to the accomplishment of moral goodness and her conception of a moral demand. Regarding the empirical aspect connected to our *experience* of moral goodness, it is now possible to add more content to the above-mentioned distinction between *eros*-love and *agape*-love, which has important implications for the direction of movement connected to the accomplishment of moral goodness. We see here how Murdoch’s Greek metaphysical interpretation of existence, together with the connection between goodness and knowledge (truth), makes her take an empirical point of departure that emphasises morality as a spiritual journey *towards* goodness instead of as a reception of goodness. In Murdoch, morality is thus based in *human* creativity, and any sense of unity must stay within this border. The above analysis of the Good can now help clarify the initial explanation of Murdoch’s conception of love as *eros*-love. We have seen how Murdoch draws attention to the fact that human beings are constantly creatively picturing their world and how this works both on the level of our particularizing scrutiny of the world and in our creative unification of reality. The creative force of love is thus placed *within* the human being in terms of an ongoing creative development of pictures and concepts that are more or less in compliance with a truthful vision of reality. The perfect Good however remains a separate and mysterious magnet, and virtue, in terms of selfless love of the real, remains imperfect. Moral imperfection is however connected

to the failed accomplishment of a movement *towards* an unreachable goal, whereas Løgstrup's individual fails 'backwards' in his or her destruction of the goodness already given.

Regarding the metaphysical aspect, there is an important difference in the conception of the Good as an unconditional and necessary aspect of existence. In Løgstrup, the life-expressions are seen as woven into *existence* as interpersonal phenomena, whereas in Murdoch the Good is woven into human *consciousness* as an idea of transcendence. This means that Murdoch's human being is situated in an aimless world, in which it nevertheless has an experience of a unified directedness towards the Good and of seeing the world in its light (Antonaccio 2012, 64). An important feature of virtue in Murdoch is thus that it corresponds with the purposelessness of life itself – virtue is good for the sake of nothing (SoG, 84). The goodness of virtue thus consists in its formal correspondence with the separate and independent sovereign Good, which is as such a *finality without end*. This insight Murdoch derives from Simone Weil – partly drawing on Kant – who suggests that the sovereignty of Go(o)d lies in its independence of any means, which thus makes it a *finality* (MGM, 106). Its finality is closely connected to its purposelessness in the sense that it does not serve any end, but represents the end itself: "The true saint believes in 'God' [Good] but not as a super-person who satisfies all our ordinary desires 'in the end'. (There is no end, there is no reward)" (MGM, 106). This is the sense in which virtue represents purposiveness without purpose – it points towards a separate finality beyond human ends, which thus unifies existence into a larger framework than the jumble of contingent reality. The idea of the moral absolute as finality without end resembles the point made previously about Løgstrup's life-expressions, which similarly did not receive their goodness from their human ends but from their manifestation of the reality of an active absolute moral ground outside, or 'before', the evil will of the self. However, in Murdoch the Good remains detached, transcendent, alone, and magnetic in its 'absolute for-nothingness' (SoG, 90). As Schweiker has remarked, it does not actively confer value on human life, but shows us how love of virtue is valuable as an end in itself (Schweiker 1996). Murdoch's conception of love as love of the Good might thus initially seem to suggest that what is morally required is personal salvation accomplished by love of the Good, rather than love of the other person. This objection is connected to Schweiker's critique of Murdoch, in which he accuses her of merely establishing the reality of the Good (which must be loved), but failing to establish the goodness of reality and thereby the value of the other person, whom she nevertheless claims as the primary object of our love (Schweiker 1996, 227). This objection corresponds to the second aspect of my overall analysis, which concerns the idea, in both Murdoch and Løgstrup, of a moral demand of love of the other person as based in the absolute

moral ground. In the following section I engage with Schweiker's critique in a discussion of Murdoch's idea of an absolute ethical demand.

2.6 The Demand of Love of Individuals

In his article 'The Sovereignty of God's Goodness', Schweiker criticises Murdoch's idea of the Good as being insufficient to form *the* basis for a realist ethics. The main objection is Murdoch's failure to establish the value of the individual, which is, I suggest, closely connected to the idea of the demand of love of the individual. The question is, why should we love individuals? Why are they valuable?

First of all, Schweiker shows how Murdoch's conception of the Good avoids any internalist conceptions of morality, as e.g. in existentialism and (Kantian) idealism. External reality is the starting point in morals in contrast to e.g. internal ideas of authenticity or Reason (Schweiker 1996, 227). However, Schweiker still has two main objections to Murdoch's moral realism.

In the first objection Schweiker argues that Good cannot symbolise the real if it does not contain an idea of the real as valuable. If we are to be able to establish a realist ethics claiming that the value of individual reality is sovereign to (selfish) human power, we need a sovereign moral concept that is directly connected to the value of individual reality. This we find, Schweiker contends, in the Christian conception of God as the creator of the actual worth of finite existence (Schweiker 1996, 226). In contrast to Good, the power of God actively binds itself to finite reality and confers value thereon, and this is necessary if the value of reality is to be superior to the powerful human ability to join and create its own world as we saw regarding the 'one-making' aspect of consciousness. In this sense, the Good symbolized the goodness of *virtue*, but not the goodness inherent in the reality attended to (Schweiker 1996, 232). This is indeed a strong and effective critique that points out possible limits within Murdoch's philosophy, and I shall therefore not assert that Schweiker has no reason to make this point. However, it is important, I suggest, to be aware of the fact that this critique is made from a Christian point of view. As we have seen in the above, however, Murdoch's metaphysical point of departure is not Christian, and it is thus important to assess her conception of the value of the individual within the metaphysical framework with which she works. The Good does not love individuals, but it enables us to *see* others and to understand the limit and proper shape of our love. In this regard, Murdoch, first of all, simply asserts that individuals are valuable, and that we do not need any (consoling) conception of divine love in

order to understand this: “Human beings are valuable, not because they are created by God or because they are rational beings or good citizens, but because they are human beings” (MGM, 365). What Murdoch is anxious to stress is that we naturally discover this, if *we* really *look* properly and selflessly at reality. We discover that individual reality is valuable in terms of its private and irreducible aspects, that is, we discover that ultimately we cannot, and should not, dominate the world entirely with our own pictures and words (SoG, 96). With reference to Adorno’s philosophical attempt to ‘save the object’, i.e. the individual, from being swallowed by human power, Murdoch simply asserts the necessity of respect for the real: “The details of our world deserve our respectful and loving attention, as artists have always known. There is an attentive patient delay of judgement, a kind of humble agnosticism, which lets the object be” (MGM, 377). This reply will most likely not satisfy Schweiker, especially because Murdoch conceives of the value of the real in a quite different manner to traditional Christian ethics. I return to the broader scope of Murdoch’s alternative version of an affirmative ontology in the part on religion and ethics, but for now it is sufficient to stay with Murdoch’s point that reality must be respected simply because of its irreducible ‘thereness’, which checks the human tendency to want to master and make its own what is not. In much of her thought Murdoch thus seems to suggest, I contend, that we should love the other person out of *respect* for her individuality and irreducibility, and not because she is always already loved by a divine force of sovereign love. In this sense, the neighbour-love in Murdoch often connotes a kind of detached respect for what is not oneself rather than an idea of the actual loveable nature of the other: “Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real” (SaG, 51). As we shall see shortly, the idea of love in Murdoch is, however, not restricted to a detached perception of others.

Firstly, however, I return to Schweiker’s second objection, which is connected to Murdoch’s notion of respect. In his second objection, Schweiker claims that Murdoch lacks a concept of *conscience*, which has a unique place in connection to the idea of the value of individual reality. If there is to be a superior and good power in human existence, this power must continuously be present as a demand of human obedience, and it cannot merely be there as a ‘magnet’ towards which we are naturally drawn in our search for truthful vision. To fully grasp the scope of human morality one must include conceptions of our experience that some finite reality simply ought to be and is holy and untouchable as such (e.g. a child, another person) (Schweiker 1996, 233). In the Christian tradition, Schweiker contends, the idea of conscience testifies that human power is always in service of finite existence by being subject to a created moral law and that “the shape of our existence [is] responsive to the non-

instrumental value of others” (Schweiker 1996, 233). Murdoch’s analogue to this idea of conscience might initially be connected to her idea of loving attention. However, the idea of attention does not connote the idea of a ‘demand’ or the continuous presence of a divine moral law in the way Schweiker’s notion of conscience does. What Schweiker seems to miss in this regard is the fact that Murdoch actually does incorporate an idea of a ‘moral law’ and an absolute moral demand by merging her idea of morality as a Platonic pilgrimage with Kant’s idea of a ubiquitous moral imperative:

We have to find our certainties [of the Good] for ourselves, in ourselves, and we must believe in our *duty* and ability to discover and make our own the truths which we first intuit or make out as shadows. [...] Here we find ourselves close to Kant’s Categorical Imperative, the moral confidence which can only be consulted in each individual bosom [...] This is the spiritual force and energy which moves us toward virtue, and it is as if it came from a divine source, and is the form in which, at our different levels of achievement, we can know the divine (MGM, 434-435, my emphasis).

Thus, in our confrontation with reality, we do not merely intuit the connection between goodness and truthful perception, but we also naturally have a sense of our *duty* to attend properly before judging and acting, however vague this sense may be. In this regard, Murdoch insists that the concept of duty should be seen as one aspect within the Platonic idea of goodness as purification of selfish desire. Duty should thus be seen as ‘innate in morality’ in the sense that we do not merely experience that we *can* improve our vision but that we also *ought* to do so, that is, the idea of the absolute Good suggests the idea of duty – our sense of truth suggests that the good person *ought* to be able to see clearly (MGM, 304). There is thus an important dialogue between Kant and Plato in Murdoch’s philosophy, and this also corresponds to the double structure of consciousness. As Antonaccio has remarked, the Platonic concept of attention is connected to the particularizing aspect of consciousness, whereas the Kantian concept of duty is connected to the whole of the human being. The idea of attention thus makes sure that our need for unity does not swallow or reduce the complexity of contingent reality (Antonaccio 2012, 66). With Kant, Murdoch however emphasises that the whole of the human being is under a continuous moral demand of respect for reality, and this aspect of Murdoch’s moral philosophy is as important as the idea of a moral quest towards seeing the real. What we ought to obey is the irreducible and private reality of the other.

Finally, it still remains to illuminate whether Murdoch's conception of love is restricted to a kind of compassionate but detached respect for the reality of others. In Løgstrup, goodness as a variation of *agape*-love is given in interdependency, and the demand of love is thus naturally closely entangled with the other person, insofar as goodness is always already accomplished in immediate interpersonal community. The sovereignty of goodness is neighbour-love. In Løgstrup, I suggest, one can thus speak of the sovereignty of Love. In Murdoch, however, Good is superior to Love, but this does not mean that love does not make up our most purified idea of what goodness is. After a series of critical remarks about the obsessiveness and selfishness commonly connected to human love, Murdoch says:

In spite of all the warnings mentioned above, love, love of lovers, family, of friends is an ultimate consolation and an ultimate saviour. To love and to be loved is what we all desire, and what we desire as, as we are able to see it, good (MGM, 346).

What Murdoch is anxious to show is thus not, I suggest, that we should detach ourselves from others in a respectful attempt to 'let them be', but instead that Good remains superior to Love in the sense that we ought to purify our love through our relation to the Good – love ought to be *real* and not egoistic fantasy. It is in the redirection of desire towards the Good (virtue) that we are enabled to love unselfishly (MGM, 344). As was the case in Løgstrup, true love is the ultimate saviour, but in Murdoch it is, in contrast to Løgstrup's conception, possible – and obligatory – to strive for 'virtuous and truthful love' (MGM, 344). This does not, however, exclude the possibility that selfless love can be simple and immediate, but, Murdoch insists, these cases are rare and "almost all human love fails in some way" (MGM, 345).

Finally, we can now see the difference between Løgstrup's and Murdoch's notions of the demand of neighbour-love reflected in their different anthropologies. In Løgstrup, purified and thus real love had to be conceived of as a gift that 'took the self aback', because his negative conception of the will reduced any human effort to self-indulgence. In Murdoch, love is conceived of as a *human* ability, which is, however, blurred by ignorance and self-protective fantasy. The demand in Murdoch is thus to purify our love in respect for the reality of the other, and what we ought to surrender is thus not the will but the fantasies of our unifying and possessive ego.

PART II

The Religious Aspect of Ethics

Until now I have mainly discussed the first two analytical aspects presented in the introduction. We have thus seen how both Murdoch and Løgstrup move between metaphysics and empiricism in their attempt to reclaim the importance of metaphysical reflection in moral philosophy, and we have seen how both claim to find an inherent absolute moral demand within human existence.

However, it has also been clear throughout that both thinkers work with metaphysical frameworks with certain religious connotations. Løgstrup frames his conception of human morality using a Christian vocabulary, and although he does not explicitly name the positive power of the life-expressions *agape*-love, it is an obvious classification, I suggest, when considering his strong emphasis on goodness as something *given* that cannot in any way be willed or created by the human being. In contrast, Murdoch's metaphysical framing of a moral absolute in terms of the Good clearly connotes a kind of mystical non-personal deity towards which we ought to direct our spiritual energy, i.e. *eros*-love.

What I aim at investigating in this last part of the thesis is the third aspect of the overall analysis identified in the introduction, that is, the connection between religion and human morality. In what follows, I shall discuss how Løgstrup and Murdoch conceive of the concept of 'religion' and whether they consider it necessary to be religious in order to endorse their respective conceptions of human morality.

K. E. Løgstrup

3.0 Creation and Annihilation

In *The Ethical Demand*, we have seen how Løgstrup argues that the goodness of life is *given* in the pre-reflexive phenomenon of trust. Later we saw how Løgstrup developed a terminology for the moral phenomena given in existence, calling them sovereign expressions of life. In this regard Løgstrup insisted that the reality of these phenomena and the ethical demand that they instantiate can be demonstrated in purely human terms, that is, as a metaphysical description of basic traits of the human condition. However, it is also obvious that Løgstrup draws on a Christian way of thinking in his metaphysical interpretation of the life-expressions, which clearly echoes Lutheran anthropology and the idea of life as a gift, which has clear connotations of love as *agape*-love: we are always already ‘handed over’ to the neighbour by the sovereign power of trust (ED, 8). In what follows I turn to Løgstrup’s later work *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation) from 1978 where, among other things, Løgstrup makes a strict distinction between metaphysical description and religious interpretation. According to Løgstrup, the phenomenological analysis of life as a created gift can initially be unfolded as a *metaphysical description* that makes up the basis for a possible *religious interpretation*. If religion is to be anything other than an unworldly idea about a loving Father-God, it must be backed up by a valid philosophical, i.e. phenomenological, analysis of phenomena that suggests that life is in fact a created gift (Christoffersen 2017, 181). It is thus possible to argue, according to Løgstrup, that the specifically Christian idea of revelation is based on a universally valid view of the world as *created*. In this regard, Niels Thomassen has emphasised the importance of keeping in mind that Løgstrup’s claim about the universal validity of his metaphysics is also based on phenomenological *interpretation* of the life-expressions as instances of anonymous and unconditional goodness. It is on the basis of the anonymous goodness of the life-expressions that it is natural, according to Løgstrup, to add a religious interpretation to the phenomenological interpretation and read the life-expressions as created. Furthermore, he proposes that their createdness suggests ‘the interpretation that we are not irrelevant to the universe’ (ST, 273; Thomassen 2005, 118-19).

As Christoffersen has pointed out, the distinction between metaphysical and religious interpretation thus divides Løgstrup’s conception of Christianity into two parts (Christoffersen 2017, 183). The first part is the metaphysical basis, which is not restricted to Christianity as such. It is the *philosophical* investigation of the metaphysics of existence which describes universal traits about human existence. This is what we have seen in the previous parts about

trust and the sovereign expressions of life, where Løgstrup argued in favour of affirmative ontology in contrast to negative ontology as the basis of existence. Thus, at this level, Løgstrup analyses how *we* are woven into the fabric of life and how this means something to *us* (Christoffersen 2017, 181). The second part is specifically Christian, and it contains the claim that the creative power of life is also *concerned with us*. This is the Christian idea of revelation, that is, the idea of Christ as the personification of God's sovereignty as creator and redeemer, who is concerned with *our* well-being and in whose kingdom we will all be saved from death (annihilation) (ST, 302-3; Christoffersen 2017, 183). I return to the specifically Christian hope for redemption further below. The seemingly Christian metaphysical framework that we have seen Løgstrup working with throughout is thus not, according to Løgstrup, specifically Christian, but represents a universally valid philosophical interpretation of the structure of human existence which makes up one part of Christianity. This is what leads Løgstrup to say that the battle between religiosity and irreligiosity must initially be fought at the level of metaphysics – religion understood, however, as Christianity.

In what follows I will show how Løgstrup's conception of Christianity is tied to his *philosophy* of creation and annihilation in order to discuss the credibility of his claim that a philosophy of creation can be accepted on 'purely human terms' and does not have to involve religiosity.

In ED, Løgstrup admits that the connection between the analysis of trust and the idea that life is a gift cannot be substantiated phenomenologically, but must be accepted voluntarily as such or rejected (ED, 116). But although one accepts life as gift, it is also full of contingent suffering and death, and the idea of life as a created gift must take these aspects into account. This is what Løgstrup does in his analysis of existence as a suspension between creation and annihilation in ST. In ED we have already seen how Løgstrup conceives of the ethical life as a contradiction between the given goodness of life and the evil will's destruction of the given by its inevitable selfishness. In ST, Løgstrup gives an account of the inherent tension in existence on a cosmological level, where the constant tension between creation and annihilation corresponds with the contradictory nature of our moral lives.

In ST, Løgstrup initially asserts the reality of annihilation through an analysis of our experience of the irreversibility of *time* (ST, 37). Firstly, Løgstrup explains that irreversibility can mean two things. On the one hand, it can mean that time only has one direction – whether linear or circular. On the other hand, and this is how he uses the term, irreversibility is connected to the (Christian) idea that time never reoccurs – what has been is annihilated by the irreversibility of time. In this regard Løgstrup concludes: "Then it is impossible that time can

run circularly, it runs linearly, and irreversibility is based on and manifest in annihilation” (ST, 37, my transl.). Løgstrup simply rejects the Greek conception of the circularity of time as foreign to us and insists that for us time is linear in the sense that ‘what is gone is gone’ and ‘what has come to nothing has come to nothing’ (ST, 38, my transl.). Løgstrup thus interprets our experience of the contingency of life as annihilation and argues that time comes into being for us due to the irreversibility of annihilation. As we shall see later, the connection between annihilation and contingency is naturally challenged by the Greek point of departure in Murdoch. The second feature of our experience of time is our ability to remember past moments and recall them later in our memory – what Løgstrup calls ‘retention’ (ST, 38). Retention and memory are thus products of our consciousness. What we do when we recall memories is a creative attempt at preventing time from erasing our lives and experiences – we create our memories with pictures and language. What Løgstrup is anxious to stress however, is that time is not merely a product of the creative human consciousness, but originates in the universal force of annihilation, which is independent of the human being (ST, 39). He criticises Husserl and Heidegger for conceiving of time as a product of our own consciousness and suggests that our experience of time is instead a product of our revolt against the precondition of time in the first place, that is, a revolt against the external force of annihilation (ST, 39). This means that our experience of time is based in a force working independently of the human being, which makes annihilation something more than a human experience – it is a reality into which we are born.

This leads to a decisive point connected to Løgstrup’s idea of creation as the contrast to annihilation. We experience time as a revolt against annihilation, but then the question is what is the power that makes this resistance possible. In this regard Løgstrup does not regard the creative power of consciousness as able to suspend annihilation. Memory is always backwards; it is always reproduction and not actual creation (ST, 39). The power to suspend annihilation must thus also be something external to the human being; it must be a creative power that sustains and maintains human life. Such power is what we saw in Løgstrup’s conception of the sovereign expressions of life. They represented pre-reflexive moral powers that empower us to resist annihilation, however not by our own will. As Christoffersen has remarked we are thus, in Løgstrup’s picture, thrown into the middle of a ‘battle between contradictory forces’ (Christoffersen 2017, 179). In this way, there is a creative power in the universe, but the creative acts that occur in the universe are not absolutely creative in themselves, because they are subject to contingency and thus annihilation (Christoffersen 2017, 180). The human being can thus merely re-create; it has no power of genuine creation. Only

the ‘power of being’, exemplified through the life-expressions, has this ability. The life-expressions are ‘pre-personal’ as sovereign positive powers of life and yet refracted through the contingent individual person as positive sustainment of human flourishing and a protection against annihilation (ST, 160).

With this in mind, it is now possible to see the connection between Løgstrup’s metaphysics of creation and annihilation and ethics. By looking at the life-expressions as examples of the suspension of annihilation, we can see how the ‘power of being’ is ethically qualified, that is, it is not merely power but an anonymous power of sovereign goodness. Løgstrup’s philosophy of ongoing creation in terms of a suspension of annihilation is thus the basis for his affirmative ontology.

As I mentioned above, Løgstrup claims that his philosophy of creation is purely metaphysical description that coheres with our experience of the irreversibility of time and of the unconditional goodness of the sovereign expressions of life. However, the philosophy of creation is then also used to support the religious ‘leap’ of belief in the revelation of God as creator and redeemer through Christ (ST, 302). The transition from metaphysics to religion is thus an *interpretation* of the metaphysical investigation, and this interpretation claims that we are not merely inexplicably thrown into a world of contradictory forces and furthermore empowered with the gifts of an anonymous power of goodness. Furthermore, the religious interpretation points out that the unconditional nature of the life-expressions *indicates* the possibility that the power of being is concerned with us, which makes it natural to interpret this power as ‘personal’, i.e. as God concerned with the human being (ST, 280). In this regard, Christoffersen has pointed out that for Løgstrup a *theology* of creation must be founded in a valid *philosophy* of creation, because the religious interpretation must be based in a worldview that can be accepted by anyone: “The analysis depends on its purely philosophical validity. It must be acceptable by anyone who does not agree with the religious total-interpretation” (ST, 279, my transl.; Christoffersen 2017, 182). To believe in life as created, without religious belief in revelation, can as such represent a belief in affirmative ontology as a philosophical contrast to nihilism, whereas belief in revelation of God through Christ presupposes affirmative ontology. This is the sense in which the battle between religiosity and irreligiosity is located at the level of metaphysics. Nevertheless, I contend, along with both Christoffersen and probably also Murdoch, Løgstrup’s *philosophy* of existence as a created gift is already religiously biased. His analysis of the life-expressions as metaphysical indicators of a sovereign God is, I suggest, already based in the Christian insistence on time as suspended between creation and annihilation and the subsequent conclusion that the human being must constantly *receive* its

power from the sovereign power of being. Furthermore, his rejection of non-Christian cosmologies as adequate depictions of the human condition results in the (rather restricted) dichotomy between nihilism and philosophy of creation (ST, 279). As a response, we shall see in the following part on Murdoch that it is in fact possible to work with affirmative ontology on other terms.

3.1 The Problem of Suffering and Death

Before moving on to Murdoch, however, I shall briefly discuss Løgstrup's conception of the problem of evil and death (contingency) and their relation to the sovereign power of goodness. In his metaphysics, Løgstrup described existence (and cosmos) as a struggle between the contradictory forces of creation and annihilation, and gave a phenomenological account of our experience of being suspended between creation and annihilation by the force of the life-expressions. We have also seen in the previous parts how the evil will of the human being annihilates the given goodness of the life-expressions in mistrust and ruthlessness. However, the force of annihilation is ultimately external to the human being, and much suffering and death happens completely contingently. The tension between good and evil, suffering and flourishing, as an inherent part of existence, is acceptable at a metaphysically descriptive level, but Løgstrup complicates the matter on the religious level when he asserts that "God is the omnipresent power of being in all of existence" (ST, 302, my transl.). This means that the transition from metaphysics to religion does not result in a dissolution of the tension between creation and annihilation, but suggests that God, as the power of being, has created an ambiguous world, full of both joy and contingent suffering: "Religiously interpreted, the eternal and divine power of creation has incorporated annihilation and the associated suffering and contingency in his creation" (ST, 295, my transl.). Therefore, God cannot be seen as a superior *moral* idea as we saw in Murdoch's transformation of God into the Good. It is not possible simply to say that God *is* the sovereign expressions of life. God is beyond the human understanding of good and evil, and, according to Løgstrup, we should refrain from judging God's power on human moral terms (ST, 297). This does not erase the difference between good and evil, Løgstrup suggests, but stresses that God's power is ultimately inexplicable and irreducible to human reason. The Christian person is thus not released from the inexplicable and ambiguous nature of existence. The only thing the Christian can resort to is the Christian *hope*, based on the belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ and his proclamation of a kingdom of God. The Christian must believe that God as the sovereign power of being at some point will

realize the divine kingdom of Jesus' proclamation, where there will be no annihilation and only positive creation (ST, 302). There is thus an important difference between 'the Creation' and 'the Kingdom of God': "[God's] power is more than anything existing, it is eternal and indestructible, and it lets what exists come to an end. The power is pre-ethical, creation is connected to annihilation, splendour to cruelty. In contrast, goodness and eternity rules in Jesus' divine kingdom, and there is no annihilation" (ST, 302, my transl.). That God's power is pre-ethical, however, does not make it ethically indifferent – this is what we learn from the life-expressions – but belief in God does not remove the ambiguity of his creation either, and thus faith in the teachings of Jesus as the promise of God always remains fragile. The idea of a Christian *hope* must however also be substantiated phenomenologically, in order not to run the risk of being wordless and naïve. Hope is not a specifically Christian phenomenon, but a sovereign expression of life in the same sense as trust, mercy, love, and the openness of speech (ST, 319). Hope is a fundamental hope for life that peeps out even in the most hopeless situations. It is of course conditioned by annihilation and the contingency of the world, but as such it breaks the chains of annihilation because it receives its power from the sovereign power of being and reveals our dependence on a power that is not our own: "It is curious that a human being can be fully aware of mortality, but mortality cannot defeat hope, nor even weaken it [...] In relation to everything we have in our power, we are, on a deeper level, dependent on what is not in our power" (ST, 320, my transl.). On a very deep level, we all know that everything we are and accomplish is subject to annihilation, but in spite of this, we cannot help hoping for life and the suspension of death. This is because, Løgstrup suggests, hope is based in the power that can suspend annihilation and continuously does so by virtue of the life-expressions, and this is what makes it natural to transform the natural hope of existence into the Christian hope of the kingdom of God (ST, 321).

It is now clear that Løgstrup's ethics rests on a Christian worldview, based on the idea of creation, annihilation and the 'power of being' as the foundation of the morally qualified human existence, as well as the specifically Christian eschatological hope for the kingdom of God. It is however important to keep Løgstrup's division of the Christian worldview into two parts in mind, which makes it possible for him to argue that the metaphysical description of our moral situation is universally valid, even if one does not believe in God as concerned with us. Løgstrup's own division does however also indicate the close entanglement between his metaphysics and Christianity, which in the end cannot, I contend, be separated. A response to Løgstrup's ethics is thus also always already a response to his understanding of Christianity.

Iris Murdoch

4.0 The Ubiquity of Good

As we have already seen in the above, Murdoch's asserts that existence as such is pointless. She conceives of love as *eros*-love, and the sovereign Good remains detached, distant, and absolutely transcendent. Naturally, this influences her interpretation of religion and makes her connection of religion to ethics radically different from Løgstrup's, despite the fact that they both conceive of goodness as selfless love of the neighbour. In MGM, Murdoch describes religion thus:

Religion is a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life. [...] It must go all the way, to the base, to the top, *it must be everywhere*, and is in this respect unlike other things (e.g. sex) of which something apparently similar might be said. It adheres essentially to the conception of being human, and cannot be detached; and we may express this by saying that it is not accidental, does not exist contingently, is above being (MGM, 426, my emphasis).

This quote follows the previous analysis of the sovereign Good, but it also adds, I contend, an important feature, by stressing that goodness must be 'everywhere', that is, not merely within consciousness, but in the whole of existence. An important point I want to make in this section is that Murdoch does not merely conceive of goodness in terms of human vision and conduct (virtue), but further claims that goodness is rooted in reality as such. Until now we have seen how the Good was a transcendental aspect of consciousness, but in her retrieval of the religious mythology in Plato, Murdoch shows how the Good can be understood as the transcendental precondition of reality as such (Antonaccio 2012, 194). As George Steiner points out in his foreword to the collection of Murdoch's essays, *Existentialists and Mystics*, the goodness of reality in Murdoch's thought should be understood in terms of 'immanent transcendence' of the Good (Steiner 1998, 19). Drawing on this point, and insights from Antonaccio's research, I will further elaborate my previous claim that it *is* possible to read Murdoch's ontology as – using Løgstrup's terminology – affirmative. The main reason this argument is connected to the idea of religion is, I suggest, the fact that Murdoch's affirmative ontology is based on the idea that religion, in terms of a kind of 'atheistic spirituality', is an inherent aspect of the metaphysical idea of the Good. As shown above, religion in Murdoch is defined as the 'belief' in the metaphysical idea of 'the necessity of good and virtue' in human existence (MGM, 428). It is thus impossible, I contend, to make the same sharp distinction between metaphysics and

religion in Murdoch as in Løgstrup, where religion is understood on theistic terms and seen as a step beyond metaphysical description. We have noted Løgstrup's point that the battle between religiosity and irreligiosity must be fought on a metaphysical level, where only affirmative ontology allows for religious interpretation. As we shall see, Murdoch's metaphysics gives this assertion a very different meaning, though without rejecting its truth. This is so, I suggest, because Murdoch's affirmative ontology is rooted in Platonic metaphysics, which is at the same time constituted as a mythical-religious picture of the origin of the cosmos and as a picture of the human condition as a moral-religious pilgrimage towards the Good 'beyond being'.

As a mythical-religious picture, Murdoch uses Plato's myth about the Demiurge's creation of the cosmos from the dialogue *Timaeus*. As we shall see, Murdoch's reading of the myth clarifies her assertion of the ubiquity of value (the Good) in human existence and the sense in which religion is a (non-theistic) aspect of human morality. As Antonaccio has emphasised, the most important moral features of the *Timaeus*, according to Murdoch, are its two opposing types of causality, which can be seen through two different meanings of the concept 'necessity' (Antonaccio 2012, 192). I shall therefore give a brief account of Murdoch's reading of the myth of creation in the *Timaeus* in order to clarify the significance of the two types of necessity and their importance for Murdoch's account of human morality. In this regard, it is important to recall the point made earlier that Murdoch regards the Platonic myths as neither scientific fact nor divine revealed truth, but as *metaphors* for the moral condition of human beings.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents the story about the Demiurge, a perfectly good and unselfish creator god who creates the world with the desire that it be as good and perfect as himself (*Timaeus* 29e). However, the Demiurge does not create *ex nihilo*, but turns to two sources that represent divine and contingent necessity respectively. The divine necessity is the eternal Forms, with the Form of the Good as the sovereign among them, and the Demiurge uses the Forms as the ideal model for his creation. For his creation the Demiurge also needs something from which he can create, and for this he turns to the chaotic body of already existing matter consisting of water, fire, earth, and air (*Timaeus* 53b). This 'matter' represents the second and negative type of necessity by containing qualities such as contingency, finitude, unpredictability, and irregularity, which resist the divine reason and absolute goodness of the Demiurge and thus make creation based on the eternal Forms difficult. This means that the creation of the world is carried out through divine reason persuading necessity to realize the greatest good possible (MGM, 107). In this way, the nature of the world is a tension between divine reason and necessary matter, and as such it is an imperfect copy of divine perfection

(Timaeus 48a). This tension is reflected in the human being as well. We are created in the Demiurge's image, with a divine and rational soul that strives for the truth of the Good, but at the same time we are, *qua* our mortal bodies, subject to the random necessity of contingent matter (Timaeus 68e; 69d). Regarding our moral situation, we are thus always already 'fallen' in the sense that we are blinded by the finite shadows of eternal perfection but interpret the shadows within our restricted vision as a true picture of reality, and we are always already further away from the real than the Demiurge (recall the Cave).

In her writings, Murdoch suggests that the Demiurge can be interpreted as the ideal artist (i.e. not like the ones criticised by Plato), who imposes form on the random contingent matter and is thereby able to 'reduce disharmony' by creating in accordance with the Good (FS, 436). Although the world is subject to the negative necessary causality mentioned above, it is also redeemed by the creative eros-love, which confers some degree of order and harmony on the world: "This creation myth [*Timaeus*] represents in the most elegant way the redemption of all particular things which are, although made of contingent stuff, touched and handled by the divine" (MGM, 477). Following Antonaccio (2012, 194), I suggest that this is the sense in which Murdoch's ontology can be read as affirmative, although of course in a very different sense to what we saw in Løgstrup. It is not merely human consciousness, but the whole of creation which is illuminated and 'redeemed' by being pierced by the light of the Good. Furthermore, the human being is, *qua* the unifying aspect of consciousness, a reflection of the divine artist, and the good artist is thus capable of a similar redemption of particular reality by virtue of her ability to attend properly and to see the 'divine in the necessary', that is, to see the sovereign light of Good in and through contingent particularity:

The light of Good, as truthfulness and justice and love, gives life to reality for the enlightened knower. The good man perceives the real world, a true and just seeing of people and human institutions, which is also a seeing of the invisible through the visible, the real through the apparent, the spiritual beyond the material (MGM, 475).

The Good is what allows us to see, and when we attend to the world we see both rational connections and goodness and how these are at the same time disrupted by contingent and irreducible particularity and fear. That is, when we attend properly we see *reality* as it is, and through this truthful vision we are (morally) redeemed with insight into the connection between goodness and truthful vision (MGM, 474). The world is a mess, but only partly so, and the

good person is freed *qua* her extended ability to orientate herself in a truthful vision of the partial coherence (form) of the world and intuit in glimpses the perfect form of the Good.

Apart from the affirmative nature of Murdoch's Platonic ontology, it is now also possible to see the obvious religious connotations within the idea of the moral pilgrimage of the virtuous individual. I therefore suggest that Antonaccio is right when she suggests that Murdoch should rather be read as a genre of 'spiritual counsel' than as a failed Christian who unsuccessfully tries to avoid the old 'God' (Antonaccio 2012, 178). In this regard the *Timaeus* is an important part of the background picture, because it underlines Murdoch's Greek conception of religion and morality as a practical form of spirituality, unlike Løgstrup's entirely descriptive metaphysics that eventually leads to the religious belief in merciful redemption from 'outside'.

On the other hand, Murdoch remains sensible to the aforementioned assertion that any unity within human existence remains within the limits of existence itself (there is nothing outside), and this makes it vulnerable to criticism about whether it can be properly understood as religion or whether it merely represents a humanistic form of spirituality (Schweiker 2010, 157). In the following section, I engage with this critique by connecting it to the question about the absolute sovereignty of Good *vis-à-vis* the reality of death and chance, which also represent the second form of necessity mentioned above. Does a conception of religion also need an idea of ultimate redemption? Is there no ultimate consolation? And must the Good be sovereign over death and chance?

4.1 The problem of Death and Chance

In Løgstrup, we have seen how continuous creation suspends the ultimate annihilation and saves the human being 'in the end'. Since Murdoch does not work within the framework of *creatio ex nihilo* and annihilation, her conception of the moral significance of human mortality is different. In Murdoch, the reality of death and chance is closely connected to her assumption that existence as such is pointless. As shown earlier, her assumption is that we are born to die, and there is nothing outside existence. Our inescapable mortality is, however, directly connected to our experience of the goodness of virtue: "Goodness is connected with the acceptance of real death and real chance and real transience and only against the background of this acceptance, which is psychologically so difficult, can we understand the full extent of what virtue is like" (SoG, 100). As will be clear from what follows, this does not make Murdoch an existentialist nihilist, but it rather makes her, I suggest, an austere realist who

pleaded for “[s]trong agile realism, which is of course not photographic naturalism, the non-sentimental, non-mealy-personal imaginative grasp of the subject matter” (FS, 459). What I argue in this section is that Murdoch conceives of death and chance as ‘moral pedagogues’ that remind us of (selfless) virtue as the only true form of goodness and point out the futility of selfish desire (Antonaccio 2012, 196). In order to clarify her position in this regard, I draw on parts of Murdoch’s reading of Simone Weil and the connection she makes between love of the Good (eros) and the tragic.

According to Murdoch, it is through the form of a truthful conception of tragedy that we can make sense of the connection between goodness and the acceptance of death and chance. The true tragedy does not merely contain evil and suffering, but it exposes us directly to our mortality, because most depictions of evil and suffering merely result in ‘the evasion of the idea of death’ (MGM, 104). Suffering is only ‘real’ when it does not conceal the significance of death, e.g., through the consoling (Christian) circumscription of death in terms of redemptive suffering (MGM, 119). The importance of death in tragedy is connected to its ability to reveal the truth about our condition: “Death threatens the ego’s dream of eternal life and happiness and power. Tragedy, like religion, must break the ego, destroying the illusory whole of the unified self” (MGM, 104). The reality of death thus reveals to us that we are subject to the second form of necessity mentioned in connection with the *Timaeus*, that is, we are subject to the ‘pointless necessity of the world’, and if we reflect, we see how the world *itself* must obey this ‘alien law’ of contingency (MGM, 108). This realisation is the experience of *void*, and it is what the true tragedy should depict. Murdoch’s own example of a true tragedy is Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, because of its austerity and lack of any (fake) consolation. It represents a truthful vision where “evil is justly judged and misery candidly surveyed” (MGM, 104).

Murdoch connects the realisation of our radical mortality and frailty to the purifying source of the Good. In this way, she rejects Wittgenstein’s stoicism and Sartre’s nihilism by drawing on some of Simone Weil’s central insights about how acceptance of death and real suffering is a source for purification of our life energy, our eros. In accordance with the negative form of necessity in the *Timaeus*, Weil also emphasises the finality of death and suffering by describing them as finalities that demand our *obedience* (MGM, 106). Recalling the previous analysis of Weil’s conception of the Good (God) as a finality without end, we can now make sense of how obedience to suffering can lead us to obedience to the Good, which constitutes the divine form of necessity to which we are *also* subjected: “The suffering which goes hand in hand with necessity leads us to finality without end. That is why the spectacle of

human misery is beautiful” (MGM, 106). Murdoch further suggests that Weil’s connection of real suffering and beauty can lead to the use of tragedy as an *image* of our condition as (erotic) creatures, stretched between unconditional mortality and the equally unconditional eternal Good (MGM, 106). In this way, our acceptance of our radical mortality points beyond towards the divine necessity of the Good, and exposes to us the vanity of selfishness (we will eventually die) in the light of eternal goodness (virtue). This is the sense in which, Murdoch argues, “Simone Weil’s obedience is realism exposed to good” (MGM, 111).

Naturally, this is a very different conception of death and contingency, with very different implications, to those that we saw in Løgstrup. Most important is, I suggest, the different status of the absolute moral ground in the two thinkers. In Løgstrup, the divine power of creation was the ultimate redeemer from annihilation, whereas in Murdoch, the Good does not remove death. The Good is merely *one* necessary aspect *vis-à-vis* death as an equally necessary aspect of existence. The Good is thus *morally* sovereign as the necessary precondition for our moral lives, but this does not make it omnipotent. Murdoch compares her own realism with the Christian tradition and simply claims: “The image of a morally perfect but not all-powerful Goodness seems to me better to express some ultimate (inexplicable) truth about our condition” (FS, 431). This statement anticipates Schweiker’s critique of the limits of Murdoch’s metaphysics in an article engaging Murdoch’s connection of art and morality.²³ Schweiker asks whether the inner meaning of genuine love can be fully unfolded within an ‘immanent’ metaphysics which claims that the necessary goodness of life (virtue) is fully revealed by the realisation of the necessity of death. He is uneasy about a metaphysics that does not go beyond the ‘immanent transcendence’ of the Good which pierces the human world from within the human world and makes the acceptance of death the background of the goodness of virtue (Schweiker 2012, 157). Schweiker insists, as Løgstrup probably would too, that the goodness of life must ultimately be based not on the acceptance of death but on the ‘conviction about the gift of life’, that is, on the omnipotent power of divine love (God) (Schweiker 2012, 158). Of course, Schweiker’s critique only makes sense from a Christian point of view, and he is naturally aware of this. The important aspect of Schweiker’s critical assessment is however that it makes it possible to assess Murdoch’s ‘religious’ position on her own terms. Naturally, Schweiker avoids placing Murdoch’s religious sensibility as an expression of failed Christianity, and instead he places her within a broader field of Greek inspired neo-humanism. However, he emphasises how she ultimately also goes beyond contemporary neo-humanism

²³ See Schweiker (2010)

because of her insistence on our 'supersensible destiny' and 'the transcendence of the Good' (Schweiker 2010, 158). This distinction is important, I contend, because it emphasises Murdoch's religious sensibility as rooted in a different tradition to the common western theism, and her constant and subtle movement between the 'sacred and the profane', between spiritual-metaphysical reflection and simple empiricism. In this way, Murdoch insists (along with Plato and the Buddhists) that it is possible to talk about religion without theism and without any final and ultimate redemption.

5.0 Conclusion

In this comparative study, I have aimed to show some important connections and differences between Løgstrup's and Murdoch's moral philosophies. In the introduction I put forward three aspects, with which, I suggested, it is possible to show the most important similarities and differences in the two philosophies. I shall, in conclusion, sum up the results of the analyses of these aspects throughout the thesis.

In connection with the first aspect, regarding the two-way-movement between empiricism and metaphysics, I have shown how both Murdoch and Løgstrup want to retrieve metaphysical reflection into the field of moral philosophy, but with careful attention to the irreducibility of the particular situation and particular other person. Through their phenomenological approach to actual moral experiences, they are both anxious to avoid their metaphysical sensibility slipping into dogmatism or totalizing systems. Their investigations of universal traits inherent in existences are thus always *interpretations* (Løgstrup) or *mythical metaphors* (Murdoch) that take departure in specific familiar moral experiences. The approach being very similar, we have also seen how their choices of ethical experiences and metaphysical frameworks differ in very important ways. They both work with *love* and love of the other as central concepts in moral philosophy, but whereas Løgstrup focuses on *trust* as a *given* precondition for our moral lives, Murdoch focuses on *virtues* as examples of what *we* should ideally strive for. I have argued that their respective choice of focus regarding empirical phenomena is closely connected to their metaphysical frameworks, Christian and Platonic respectively, which differ regarding their understatings of *love* as the basis for human morality. This means, I suggest, that despite the fact that both describe their choice of moral phenomena as representing *selfless* care for *the other*, one must pay attention to the fact that Murdoch's thought is a defence of human morality as *eros*-love, whereas Løgstrup builds his conception of human morality strictly on goodness as *agape*-love.

In connection with the second aspect, regarding the inherent moral demand in both thinkers, I have shown how both regard the moral qualification of existence to include an absolute and ubiquitous moral demand. In both, the demand is a demand of selfless love of the other, which is nevertheless ultimately unfulfillable because of the 'fallen' status of the human being. In this regard they thus also initially seem very similar. However, the important difference, I contend, is the direction of movement regarding the unfulfillability. In Løgstrup, the demand is unfulfillable because it has already been transgressed the moment it is heard, and there is thus nothing we can *do* as we go forward to 'make ourselves better'. As Rabjerg

points out, Løgstrup's ethics is ultimately not concerned with what we should *do* but with the goodness we have always already been *given* by virtue of the sovereign expressions of life (Rabjerg 2017, 101). In contrast, the demand in Murdoch is unfulfillable because of the impossibility of ever becoming an ideal moral agent, but in this case this is because the demand is a magnet *ahead* of us towards which we are drawn and towards which we are demanded to redirect our desires *as we move forward*. In this way, Murdoch's ethics focuses on what we ought to *do*, because moral goodness is something we must *learn*. The Greeks of course called this movement a recollection of the Forms (anamnesis), but although this indicates a movement 'backwards', it is nevertheless a movement *we* make by virtue of our *eros*-passion that reaches upwards and *onwards* in life.

Lastly, regarding the religious aspect of ethics, I have shown how both Murdoch's and Løgstrup's conceptions of human morality include a certain religious sensibility. We have seen how Murdoch's conception of religion implies that morality is an inner spiritual journey towards a clearer vision of reality. Her philosophy is thus a practical 'philosophy-to-live-by', which ultimately involves belief in the sovereign Good as the proper object of our attention. In contrast, Løgstrup's conception of the connection between religion and ethics retains a distinction between universal metaphysical *description* of existence as morally qualified on the one hand, and the Christian belief in and hope for salvation 'from outside' on the other. In this way, I contend, the important difference between the *eros*- and *agape*-structure in the two thinkers is manifest at this level too.

Because of the very different points of departure in Murdoch and Løgstrup, it is hard to give any clear cut answer as to which position offers a better resource for moral thinking today. Both thinkers use recognisable everyday moral experiences as starting points, and, I contend, both Løgstrup's analysis of the inherent goodness of trust as something which is always already there and Murdoch's analysis of our experience of goodness as actively purified desire are convincing and challenging. Because of the difference between their metaphysical framings and the consequences they have for their anthropologies, I do not see it as possible to merge the two views into one moral philosophy that combines givenness in Løgstrup's sense and active purification in Murdoch's sense. Ultimately, I suggest, one can draw on the resources from both thinkers, but one must keep in mind that this implicates that one switches between fundamental frameworks in doing so. We can never prove or know who is right in this matter, but we can keep reflecting, looking, and asking. However, I suggest, Murdoch's *practical* philosophy with its emphasis on the importance of careful and selfless *attention* is an important resource for reflection for our age. We are constantly overloaded with enormous amounts of

information from all over the world (the internet), and the continuous flow of advertisements on our smartphones, computers and TV's often draw our attention to what is easy and pleasurable and away from what is difficult and valuable. With the idea of attention as a central moral concept, Murdoch's thought can help us reflect upon the value and importance of active attention to *reality* (especially other people) and remind us of the vanity of fear, selfishness and cheap pleasures. We too often see the world and others as we want to see them, and we tend to avoid trying to really *attend* to others. In our rushed modern lives we need to slow down and *look* and *listen* in order not forget that to see and to be seen is one of the most valuable things in life.

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