Vision and Virtue: Defending a Murdochian Connection between Moral Perception and Right Action

by
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It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.
— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Introduction

Iris Murdoch posits a "vision-based" account of morality, according to which being morally good involves *seeing* things in the right way (IP, pp. 21-22).[1] In defending this view, Murdoch sets herself up in opposition to a prevalent view within philosophy in her time (which remains popular in ours) that ethics is fundamentally about *action*, or *doing* the right thing.[2] According to this view, the ethical realm is reduced to the domain of overt moments of free choice which result in publicly observable behaviour (IP, pp. 7-11). Anything which goes on internally within the mind is seen as ethically irrelevant, or important only insofar as it has an impact on concrete outer action. Murdoch thinks this is an impoverished view of morality which neglects the inner world and thus leaves out much that is important in our ethical lives. For Murdoch, our "total vision of life" - including our perceptions, feelings, beliefs and desires - all have ethical significance, regardless of whether they are expressed in action (VCM, p. 39). The most fundamental moral task is not to perform right actions, but to work towards a true vision of moral reality, which is achieved through paying just and loving attention to the world around us to perceive it for how it really is (IP, p. 33).

This kind of view might seem unacceptably passive and neglectful of the ethical importance of action. It is all very well to see things rightly, one might think, but this counts for little if one does

[1] Hereafter, I refer to Murdoch's works by the following abbreviations: IP: 'The Idea of Perfection'; OG: 'On 'God' and 'Good"; SG: 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' (in *The Sovereignty of Good*, (2001)); and VCM: 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956); and MGM: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992).
[2] Murdoch's particular targets are existentialists, behaviourists, consequentialists, and Kantians (see, e.g., IP, pp. 8-9; GG pp. 47-49).

not act well or does not care to do so. However, Murdoch does not forget about action. In fact, she thinks there is a remarkably strong link between the way we see things and the way we are moved to act. Specifically, she claims that morally good motivation is *entailed* by right vision, or that "true vision occasions right conduct" (SG, p. 64). Thus, although she emphasises vision over action, this is not meant to be at the expense of the latter - vision and action are both part of ethical life and the former encompasses the latter. For Murdoch, if we see things rightly, we will be moved to act well as a matter of necessity, so by achieving true vision, action 'comes for free'. This striking claim will be the focus of my thesis.

Murdoch is not alone in making this kind of claim. By drawing such a tight connection between vision and action, she draws an inextricable link between epistemology and ethics. For Murdoch, vision, which enables us to live and act well, is an epistemic notion, often identified with knowledge and understanding. This being so, we can place Murdoch within a tradition of thinkers reaching back to Plato who hold a Socratic "ethical intellectualist" thesis that "virtue is knowledge" (Plato, 2008, 352c).[3] According to this view, having a correct epistemic grasp (something like knowledge, or understanding, or vision) of the good is sufficient to make one a good person (i.e., someone who sees, believes, desires, and acts rightly). Moral differences are thus ultimately understood equally as epistemic differences - the difference between a virtuous person and a vicious one comes down to a discrepancy in epistemic grasp.

However, despite having an established precedent within philosophical tradition, Murdoch's claim that right vision entails right conduct appears, at least at first glance, to be quite untenable. As many

[3] See also Little (1997) for an outline and defence of "virtue is knowledge" views.

Murdoch scholars have noticed, it seems very plausible that one could see the morally relevant facts perfectly well and yet be ill-motivated.[4] Consider the bully, for instance, who sees that his action will humiliate his victim and yet performs it anyway (indeed, performs it precisely because it will humiliate), or someone who knows that eating factory farmed meat is wrong, and yet does not feel moved to cut it out of their diet. The enduring figure of Thrasymachus – who, in brash opposition to Socrates' insistence on the connection between knowledge and virtue, professes to understand quite well what is right and yet is motivated to do wrong – shows that such a worry has been present and compelling since the ancient world (Plato, 2007, B. I). I call this problem, in the context of Murdoch's view, the *problem of action,* and identify two questions which it poses: (1) how can it be that right vision leads to right motives and action? And (2) how do we account for apparent counterexamples to this claim?

In this thesis, I aim to respond to these questions and defend Murdoch's claim that right vision occasions right conduct in the face of purported counterexamples. It is important to note that my goal here is not to provide an interpretation of Murdoch's own view. The aim of this thesis is not primarily exegetical. Rather, I hope to offer my own solution to the problem of action by integrating the Murdochian picture of moral life with insights from philosophy of emotion and current literature in epistemology on understanding. Nevertheless, my account will be amenable to the Murdochian and will generally fit well within Murdoch's wider philosophical thought (though I do not claim it will be consistent with everything Murdoch says, and I make note of where my ideas explicitly diverge from hers). I think it is also an independently attractive view, which has fruitful

[4] See, for instance, Blum (2011), Setiya (2013), Cordner (2016, pp. 205-6), Hopwood (2018, p. 479), and Mason (forthcoming).

implications for "virtue as knowledge" accounts which link epistemic grasp with ethical action more generally.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: In Sections 1 and 2 I will outline the "action-based" view that Murdoch rejects and her own "vision-based" account of morality. In Section 3, I set out what I call "the problem of action" for the Murdochian view - namely, showing how right motives to act necessarily follow from seeing the world in the right way and addressing apparent counterexamples. In Section 4, I consider Kieran Setiya's (2013) response to this problem via a "Platonic theory of concepts" strategy. On Setiya's view, Murdoch distinguishes between two senses of knowing a moral concept - a shallow genetic sense, and a deeper Platonic grasp. Whilst the former epistemic state does not lead to right action, the latter does. I suggest that although Setiya provides an answer to one part of the problem of action - namely, showing why apparent counterexamples to Murdoch's tight link between epistemology and ethics do not in fact count as cases of right vision without right action -- his account leaves open the moral-psychological question of *how* right vision leads to right motives to act.

From Section 5, I begin to outline my own proposed solution - namely, that right vision or Platonic grasp requires the right emotions, and that right emotions motivate us to act virtuously. I draw an important distinction between belief and knowledge on the one hand, and vision and understanding on the other, and argue that although moral *knowledge* does not necessitate right motives, right vision or moral *understanding*, which is constituted by apt emotional responses, does. Therefore, the doctrine that "virtue is knowledge" more precisely becomes "virtue is understanding" on my view. In Section 6, I return to the problem of action and my aim of providing a mechanism that illuminates how moral perception and motivation are connected, and address a potential objection

that right vision will not necessitate *right* action. Finally, in my conclusion, I relate my proposed solution to the problem of action back to Murdoch and discuss its wider significance.

Section 1. Action-Based Accounts of Morality

In defending her vision-based account of morality, Murdoch sets herself up in opposition to an action-based, or what she calls an "existentialist-behaviourist" view (IP, p. 9). The action-based view is not attributed to any particular philosopher or school, but is rather a construct of Murdoch's that she nevertheless takes to bring together some important, commonly held principles of contemporary behaviourist, consequentialist, Kantian, and existentialist ethics (IP, pp. 8-9; GG, pp. 47-49). She includes among its proponents, for instance, Richard Hare, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stuart Hampshire, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. There are several key related assumptions of such a picture of moral life which Murdoch aims to oppose. I will explain these in turn, and then turn to Murdoch's critique and positive image of moral philosophy.

The primary assumption of the action-based view is that the basic subject of ethics is external action. According to this view, moral life consists in a series of specifiable overt actions or behaviours that are publicly observable - for instance, saving a drowning child, donating to charity, or helping a friend. When we make moral assessments, these kinds of acts are the only appropriate objects of our appraisal. Grounding this assumption is a further supposition that the agent's "inner life"- for instance, how they think, feel, and see situations - is only ethically important insofar as it influences overt action. Murdoch takes this idea to be based on a behaviouristic conception of the mind, according to which the inner, private realm is "parasitic upon the outer" (IP, pp. 10-11), or only has meaning (or even existence) insofar as it is expressed externally. On this view, mental concepts must be analysed "genetically", or based on how they relate to public behaviour (IP, pp.

9-10). Thus, as Murdoch puts it, this behaviouristic picture relegates "[w]hat is 'inward', what lies in between overt actions, [to] either impersonal thought, or 'shadows' of acts, or else substanceless dream" (IP, p.7). This being so, any inner workings of the mind which are not manifested in outer action are ethically irrelevant. To be a morally good agent, then, is essentially reducible to doing the right thing or performing the right action.

Another crucial aspect of the action-based view is its two-step picture of moral agency. Namely, we first (1) dispassionately survey a world of morally neutral facts, and then (2) engage in a separate moment of choice where we decide what to do through an act of free will (IP, pp. 8, 24, 34). These two steps are grounded on two further assumptions - a Humean fact/value dichotomy and a Humean moral psychology.

According to the Humean fact/value dichotomy, facts and values - or the descriptive and evaluative realms - are totally distinct, separated by an unbridgeable gulf. This view is expressed in David Hume's dictum that we can never derive an "ought" from an "is", and Murdoch understands the dichotomy as the general thesis that we "cannot attach morality [or value] to the substance of the world" (Murdoch in Banicki, 2017, p. 94). Thus, on the existentialist-behaviourist's two-step psychology, what I observe in the first stage is a world of brute, purely descriptive facts which are in no way value-laden or normative (IP, pp. 24, 40). Furthermore, this "scientific" factual picture of the world is supposed to be objective, independent of the moral agent's mind, and equally accessible to everyone (IP, p.34). This descriptive realm of what "is" has no evaluative implications, or no essential bearing on what we "ought" to do. Value only comes in at the second stage as a "function of the will", which is radically free and isolated from the realm of facts (IP, p.

4). For the existentialist, for example, my choice itself *creates* value. Value is not present in the neutral 'substance of the world' but imbued or invented by the agent's free subjective responses.

The action-based view's two-step picture also assumes a Humean picture of moral psychology and motivation. According to the Humean account of psychology, mental states are either cognitive or conative. Cognitive states, like beliefs, have a "mind-to-world" direction of fit in the sense that they represent the world as being a certain way and aim to match it (Little, 1997, p. 61). For example, my belief that the sky is blue represents an object in the world as possessing certain qualities, and will be correct just in case the world is actually this way - i.e. the sky is blue. By contrast, conative states, like desires or intentions, have a "world-to-mind" direction of fit in that they do not aim to represent how the world actually is but rather aim to change it to "fit" one's mind (Ibid, p. 62). Each state is mutually exclusive - you cannot have a mental state which has both directions of fit. As Murdoch notes, the existentialist-behaviourist conforms to this bifurcated picture of psychology and motivation by holding that "the will, which chooses via movement, is isolated from cognitive beliefs, thoughts and reasonings", which aim only to respond to the way the world is (IP, p. 7).

Further, according to the Humean theory of motivation, beliefs or cognitive states alone are never sufficient for motivation. An agent needs not only a belief-like "cognitive" mental state with a mind-to-world direction of fit, but also a desire (or desire-like "conative" state) with a world-to-mind direction of fit in order to be motivated (Jacobson-Horowitz, 2006, p. 561). This latter kind of psychological state is crucial for moving us to act. I might believe that there is an apple on the counter, but I will only be moved to eat it if I desire to. Analogously, it seems that I might *see* that eating meat is cruel or recognise that my action will humiliate someone, but I will only be moved

to not eat meat or not bully if I have an additional conative state - for instance, if I *care* about these facts, or *want* to be moral.

How does the Humean cognitive/conative distinction and motivational thesis relate to the action-based theory's two-step process and the fact/value distinction? Cognitive states like beliefs are confined to the first stage of the process as I apprehend facts, and conative states like desires only come afterwards when I make a choice. Since the first step is supposedly a purely cognitive, motivationally inert enterprise whereby I see facts but not values, I will always be left with a distinct moment of free choice. My beliefs, knowledge, or perception of the facts will not move me in any particular way, and my will, undetermined by the facts of the world or my cognition of it, is radically free to choose. Thus, on this view, I can always ask myself "these are the facts, but what should I do?", resulting in a fracturing between our representations of the world and our motives. As Murdoch puts it, the action-based view adheres to this kind of Humean distinction, whereby "[t]hought and belief are separate from will and action" (IP, p. 5). Belief and will, knowledge and motives, alongside fact and value (and epistemology and ethics), are thus divorced. The right vision will never guarantee the right action.

Section 2. Murdoch's Critique of the Action-based view and her Vision-based Account

2.1. Vision over Action

Murdoch thinks that the action-based view neglects the ethical importance of moral vision and the inner life, and she gives precedence to the metaphor of "seeing" over "doing" (IP, pp. 21-22). To be morally good is, fundamentally, to *see* rightly. Our basic moral task, then, is to justly and lovingly attend to the world around us, whereby we overcome any distorting influences to clearly

perceive moral reality (IP, p. 33). Thus, on Murdoch's view, ethics is intimately connected to epistemology - being good is about recognising the world as it truly is.

In response to the existentialist-behaviourist's dismissal of vision, Murdoch points out that prior to acting in the world, we need to have a particular perception of it - we need to see, think about, or construe it in a certain way. For instance, we must recognise certain features as morally, or rationally, relevant. Our choices and actions do not spontaneously arise out of nowhere. As she puts it, "I can only choose within the world I can *see*", and what I do see will determine the range of choices which I consider to be available to me (IP, pp. 35-6). For example, the act of helping the homeless man sitting on the sidewalk on my way to work will not even be on my radar if I fail to notice him, or if I see him as an inconvenient obstacle in my path rather than a human being worthy of compassion. Since our vision of the world is a precondition for any choice or action whatsoever, and what we see shapes the choices available to us, we should recognise vision which occurs prior to concrete moments of choice and action as ethically important.

However, importantly, vision is not ethically crucial for Murdoch merely because it is instrumental to action. Murdoch thinks that vision is morally fundamental in itself, regardless of whether it manifests in outward behaviour. This idea is developed in her well-known narrative of "M", and her daughter in law, "D". The example goes as follows:

> A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very 'correct' person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. [...] However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her.

> M tells herself: 'I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.' Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. [...] D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, ex hypothesi, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters (IP, pp. 29-30).

Murdoch uses this example to show that moral life cannot be reduced to the domain of publicly observable action. Assuming M's new way of seeing D is accurate, intuitively, M has improved morally. Yet, as Murdoch stresses, the change here is not in M's behaviour, but solely in her mind. Her attendings, thoughts and ways of conceiving D have no bearing on how she outwardly acts.[5] The action-based view cannot account for the moral relevance of cases like this, where inner life is not reflected in outer action.[6] Thus, we must acknowledge that the inner life has moral value in its own right, independent of action.

Murdoch therefore diverges from the action-based view by arguing that in assessing others morally, we should take into account both their actions and inner life, evaluating what she terms their "total vision of life" (VCM, p. 39). This includes aspects like the agent's "mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praise-worthy, what they think funny" (Ibid). Although these configurations of

[5] However, note that Murdoch considers vision not as an entirely passive phenomenon, but a kind of inner "activity" itself (see IP, pp. 19-21).

[6] As Murdoch notes, a proponent of the action-based view might respond that such a case has ethical relevance insofar as such a change in vision *disposes* us to act more morally (even if such action doesn't actually occur) (IP, p. 18-19). For example, if M were to hypothetically express her mental states before and after her change in vision, she would say or do different things. However, Murdoch notes that on the existentialist-behaviourist account, this change in hypothetical expression could occur without anything happening in M's mind at all (since expressions of one's mind are reducible to public acts) (ibid). Thus, the action-based view still fails to account for the ethical importance of inner action.

thought are sometimes expressed in public actions, they are often not. This being so, the proper subjects of moral evaluation are not just particular actions, but *persons*.

2.2. Fact/Value, Belief/Desire, and Moral Motivation

Murdoch also rejects the action-based view's two-step picture of moral agency, alongside the Humean fact/value dichotomy and Humean moral psychology wrapped up with it. For Murdoch, we do not survey a landscape of morally-neutral facts and then impose value on the world. Rather, the reality that we see is already imbued with values, which "pervade and colour" that which we see (MGM, p. 26). The so-called 'purely descriptive facts' are, then, essentially value-laden. For example, when I see that another person is suffering, I am presented with a case where fact and value are inextricably intertwined – where certain descriptive facts hold which are also evaluative and have normative implications, e.g., that suffering is bad, and that I ought to help them. In particular, Murdoch thinks that "thick" evaluative-descriptive concepts (or what she calls "secondary moral terms" (IP, p. 22)) present a clear example where the boundaries between fact and value break down in a "completely innocuous" way (VCM, pp. 54, 94). Concepts like "undignified" and "refreshingly simple" (as seen in the M and D story) and virtue terms like "just", "cruel", "kind", etc., have *both* descriptive and evaluative content, and to cognitively discern these qualities in the world is to see something which has both factual and evaluative elements.[7]

This rejection of the fact/value distinction links to Murdoch's further rejection of Hume's cognitive/conative dichotomy and his idea that motivation requires both states. Murdoch takes

[7] To be clear, Murdoch does not think that thick concepts as typically understood are the only instances where the fact/value dichotomy breaks down. Rather, she suggests that *all* of reality is essentially moral – there are no purely descriptive facts. This claim is quite strong, and my own account does not assume its truth, but accepts the more limited claim that there are at least some instances where facts and values are entangled.

vision to be a cognitive state which represents a reality which is already suffused with value. Further, these evaluative visions are not purely cognitive and motivationally inert, but are also conative and thus have the power to move us to act. As Snow (2013) puts it, for Murdoch, "[t]he world is value-laden [...] and consciousness, cognition and attention are value-laden as well. Belief and desire are not readily separable, but, in the virtuous person at least, form a unitary whole" (pp. 3-4).

Murdoch, therefore, holds that it is a mistake to think that beliefs and desires, reasoning and willing, are entirely distinct states, belonging to individuals with disjointed mental lives- rather, the cognitive and conative states of the person with correct vision will be inseparable from each other, wrapped up in harmony. As she claims, "[m]an is not a combination of an impersonal rational thinker and a personal will. He is a unified being who sees, and who desires in accordance with what he sees" (IP, p. 39). This being so, she rejects the Humean idea that motivation can only occur with two distinct cognitive and conative states. She instead proffers an anti-Humean moral psychology, according to which our vision or cognition of reality itself can be sufficient to move us, allowing, for example, that the perception of a homeless man's suffering may be enough to motivate a passerby to help him, without an additional desire or choice (Broackes, 2011, p. 8).

We can now see how Murdoch fully rejects the action-based view's two-step picture of moral agency. For Murdoch, it is not the case that we have certain motivationally inert beliefs about the world and then make a free choice about what we should do from an endless set of open possibilities. As Murdoch stresses, "[t]he idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like 'obedience'" (IP, p. 39). On her picture, then, the way we see the world isn't detached

from our motives and actions, but "is *compulsively* present to the will" (IP p. 38). The agent is seized by the world they perceive, and acts accordingly. Cognition and conation, representation and motivation, come hand in hand.

2.3. Right Vision and Right Action: Virtue as Knowledge

This brings me to Murdoch's key claim which I will be focussing on in the remainder of this thesis; namely, that morally right action follows from right vision. For Murdoch, the virtuous agent is "compelled by obedience to the reality he can see", whereby the morally correct motives and actions will "follow naturally", and as a matter of "necessity", from their accurate perception of the world (GG, p. 49; IP, p. 39). This being so, the Murdochian metaphor of vision does not stand in strict opposition to the idea of action, but actually encompasses it. Although Murdoch sets herself up as an opponent to the action-based view, she explicitly recognises the importance of concrete action in ethical life, cautioning readers against interpreting her as "suggesting that insight or pureness of heart are more important than action [...] Overt actions are perfectly obviously important in themselves" (IP, p. 42). She does not need to focus on outer action in her positive account precisely because she thinks that right vision is sufficient to move us towards right action, so once we have right vision, right action 'comes for free'. For Murdoch, there is no strict divide between the two, and a moral theory which accounts for the former will also account for the latter.

To be clear, Murdoch thinks that morally *perfect* or *ideal* motives and actions will only follow from a perfect or ideal grasp. Thus, only the person in an ideal epistemic state will be fully virtuous in this sense, and this is an ideal of perfection that us flawed mortals rarely approach and can never completely attain. Nevertheless, she also claims that morally right (but less than perfect) motives will follow from *right* or *true* (but less than perfect) vision. There do exist virtuous people who,

despite failing to reach an unattainable ideal of sagehood, nevertheless tend to see, and therefore act, rightly (for example, the 'virtuous peasant') (GG, pp. 51-2). Moral actions and vision exist on a scale, and there is a correlation between the degree of our epistemic grasp and our motivation. Our beliefs or cognitive states in general are wrapped up with our conative ones, so our will and actions improve or degrade as our moral perception does.

This idea that the cognitive and conative are so correlated, and that the right epistemic grasp of reality will entail right motives and actions places Murdoch within a tradition of virtue-ethical thinkers reaching back to Plato who hold the view that "virtue is knowledge". According to this view, as outlined by Socrates in Plato's *Protagoras*, an epistemic grasp of the good is sufficient to make one a good person who believes, desires, and acts rightly (2008, 352c). Variations of this idea are defended by more contemporary philosophers, including John McDowell (1979) and David McNaughton (1988).[8] Philosophers who hold the "virtue as knowledge" thesis also typically adhere to 'motivational judgement internalism', according to which there is a necessary connection between making a moral judgement and being motivated to act in accordance with it (van Roojen, 2015, p. 58). On this view, it is not possible to make a genuine moral judgement - for instance, that "I ought to donate to the poor" - without being moved, to some degree, to act to donate to the poor.[9]

If the "virtue as knowledge" thesis is right, then the difference between a virtuous and vicious person is, ultimately, an *epistemic* (and moral) difference - i.e., a variation in knowledge, understanding, or vision - rather than simply a variation in non-cognitive motives or concrete

[8] See Little (1997) for a good overview and defence of the view.
[9] Many internalist views, such as that of Korsgaard (1986) and Smith (1994) are "defeasible", meaning they hold that an agent will be moved in accordance with their moral judgements in the absence of defeaters, or *iff* some condition holds – for example, that the agent is *practically rational*. See also van Roojen (2015, pp. 57-8, 78) for the distinction between indefeasible and defeasible variations of motivational judgement internalism.

actions. As Murdoch claims, "moral differences look less like differences of choice, given the same facts, and more like differences of vision. [...] *We differ not only because we select different objects out of the same world but because we see different worlds* (VCM, pp. 40-1, my italics). When we see the world rightly, we are necessarily moved to act rightly. Thus, anyone who is ill-motivated is making some kind of cognitive error - they don't really see moral reality truly. As Little (1997) nicely puts it, according to the "virtue as knowledge" thesis, "[w]hen we do not act morally, as all too often we do not, it is because we suffer a kind of "moral blindness": to put it metaphorically, our moral vision is clouded, our attunement to the ethical superficial, our moral grasp vague or distorted" (p. 59). Such a view unifies the cognitive and conative aspects of the human psyche, alongside the realms of ethics and epistemology.

Section 3. The Problem of Action

Murdoch insists that right actions and motives "follow naturally" from right vision.[10] However, this seems prima facie quite implausible. Intuitively, I can see the world perfectly accurately and yet still be moved to act wrongly. For instance, I might see animals as intelligent, sentient beings of moral worth who should not be killed for meat, and yet still eat them. This problem is widely recognised by Murdoch scholars. Setiya (2013), for instance, observes that the Murdochian thesis that right vision entails right actions appears, on the face of it, "obviously false" (p. 8), and Hopwood (2018) echoes Setiya's worry that "sometimes people really do see the morally relevant facts before them quite clearly and still fail to act in accordance with them", giving an example of

[10] When I speak of "right" or "true" vision in the context of the problem of action, I am referring to right, but less than perfect, vision. My focus is on the question of how this kind of vision leads to right (but less than perfect) action, which I take to be a more interesting and relevant phenomenon than that of perfect vision entailing perfect action, since right vision is actually attainable for us. However, my response will also apply to the broader question of how vision is correlated in general with motives and action, and how perfect vision leads to perfect motives and action.

a chauvinist who recognises but does not care about his chauvinism (p. 479).[11] Cordner (2016) also notes that if true vision is understood as perceiving the world accurately, then the "key problem" arises that seeing, for example, someone's "shaky confidence is perfectly compatible with simple indifference to him" (pp. 205-6) . Even more worryingly, as Mason (forthcoming, pp. 1-2) points out, my immoral motives and actions might be *grounded* in a recognition of a morally relevant feature. For instance, the bully's perception that a certain action will be humiliating for his self-conscious victim is the very thing that motivates him to perform it. In this case, the bully seemingly acts immorally not only despite, but *in virtue of*, seeing accurately.

This kind of problem is not new or specific to Murdoch's account. It has consistently been regarded as a serious stumbling block for "virtue as knowledge" views and motivational judgement internalism in general.[12] For instance, many argue that "amoralist" figures like Thrasymachus or Milton's Lucifer, who purportedly sincerely judge or know moral facts and yet lack any motivation to act in accordance with them, are at the very least possible. As it is claimed, such cases of disconnect between moral cognition and motives can seemingly readily occur in multiple ways. For example, someone might judge or know the good yet *desire the bad* (like Lucifer, who exclaims "Evil, be thou my Good" (Milton, 2003, IV.109)). Alternatively, someone might judge or know the good yet just *not care* about it at all, in cases of what we might call "moral apathy" (Zagzebski, 2007, pp. 105-6).

An adherent to the Humean moral psychology that Murdoch rejects has a simple explanation for cases where right vision and right action apparently come apart. On the action-based view, these

[11] See also Blum (2011) who observes, in response to Murdoch, that some very perceptive people are ill-motivated.
[12] See, for example, Brink (1986), Smith (1994, pp. 119-121), and Stocker (1997).

cases are possible because we need both a cognitive and conative mental state to produce motivation and action. Thus, although I might see the morally relevant facts about animals, I lack a *desire* to be moral; although the bully may recognise others perfectly well, he lacks a *concern* or *care* for other people, and instead wants to hurt them. Again, Murdoch rejects this account. She thinks cases where one sees rightly but acts wrongly are not possible. So, the Murdochian's challenge now is to show *how* right vision always leads to right action, and to explain why apparent counterexamples (which seem to threaten to her claim) do not in fact constitute examples of right vision without right action. Ultimately, I think that by fleshing out a more detailed account of what moral vision is and involves, this can be done. In the following section, I will discuss and evaluate Kieran Setiya's (2013) existing interpretation of Murdoch's theory of moral vision which aims to resolve the problem of action.

Section 4. Setiya's Response: A Platonic Theory of Concepts

Setiya (2013) argues that Murdoch solves the problem of action by appealing to a Platonic theory of concepts and concept possession (p. 9). He characterises Murdoch as adhering to what he calls "moral hyper-internalism" about reasons, according to which if an agent sees or knows that some fact or circumstance obtains (for instance, that someone is suffering), and this fact is a decisive moral reason to act in a certain way (i.e., to help them), then the agent will be decisively moved to act in this way (p. 9). On this view, the virtuous person's accurate conception of their situation is sufficient to move them to act virtuously, and it would be impossible for someone to share the virtuous person's conception without being appropriately moved (p. 7). However, as Setiya notes, the intuitive plausibility of someone who sees rightly and knows the moral facts yet is ill-motivated quickly arises, hence Murdoch is faced with the problem of action, given that it is seemingly "a fact of life that people are unmoved even by decisive moral reasons" (p. 8).

Setiya thinks that Murdoch anticipates this charge and resolves the issue by distinguishing between two senses of knowing a concept - a "genetic" sense and a "Platonic" sense. On his interpretation of Murdoch's view, to see truly is to have a grasp of concepts in a Platonic sense. According to a genetic theory of concepts, the meaning of a concept is exhausted by its public use - "nothing that is not apparent in the public acquisition of a concept can be essential to its content" (p. 9). Thus, one knows a concept in a genetic sense when one knows its ordinary public usage and has the ability to apply it (pp. 9-10). An agent who grasps a concept in this genetic sense has gone through ordinary training in concept acquisition, can competently employ the concept in conversation, and use it to explain the actions of themselves and others.

If having the right moral vision were a matter of grasping the world in this sense, we can see how vision could easily come apart from motivation - I could know, for example, how the term "cruel" is used in public discourse and be able to competently apply it, without being motivated to avoid acting cruelly. However, although Murdoch recognises that genetic grasp of a concept is one sense in which we can know what a word means, this is not the only way, and it is not the relevant kind of knowledge which constitutes right or ideal vision. As she states,

> There are two senses of 'knowing what a word means', one connected with ordinary language [the genetic sense], the other very much less so. […] We do not simply, through being rational and knowing ordinary language, 'know' the meaning of all necessary moral words. (IP, p. 28)

Murdoch goes on to claim that when we come to truly see moral reality, "a process of deepening or complicating, a process of learning, a progress, which may take place in moral concepts" occurs (IP, p. 31). When I undergo such a process, I go beyond merely knowing a concept's genetic meaning. Someone who really understands or sees that a situation is cruel thus has a much deeper

kind of epistemic grasp than merely recognising how the term is used in ordinary language. Setiya terms this enriched form of understanding "Platonic" knowledge.

A concrete example of this deepening of knowledge - from genetic to Platonic grasp of concepts- might help here.[13] Consider the chauvinist - let's call him Paul - who recognises his chauvinism and positively takes pride in it. He can competently use the term in ordinary language, and thus has a genetic grasp of the concept. But suppose that one day Paul is disciplined for making sexist comments in his workplace and is required to attend a series of workshops designed to help people learn about chauvinism. The workshops include face-to-face testimonies from women who describe in great detail how their lives have been affected by misogyny. Perhaps he is also required to interview women family members about how sexism has negatively impacted their lives, and they emotionally reveal stories which he had not previously heard. Through this experience, he gains a much deeper understanding of chauvinism than he had before. As Hopwood (2018) puts it,

> The experience, as we might say, opens his eyes to what sexism and chauvinism really are. Although he had never denied that he was a chauvinist and was capable of using the term in conversation, there was a sense in which he had never really understood what chauvinism was (p. 480).

Further, Paul's improvement in moral vision involves a transformation of his motivational dispositions. As his perspective shifts, he now desires to respect women, is ashamed of his previous behaviour, and is moved to make amends.

On Setiya's reading of Murdoch, this deeper kind of knowledge which is constitutive of right vision should be understood as knowledge of moral concepts in a *Platonic* sense rather than a genetic one. According to a Platonic theory of concepts,

[13] I adapt the following example from Hopwood (2018, p. 480).

> Each concept is associated with norms for its proper use, both practical and theoretical; these norms describe when the concept should be applied and what follows from its application, both cognitively and in relation to the will; to grasp a given concept is to approximate, in one's dispositions of thought, a conformity with these norms. Concept-possession thus comes by degree, and points to a limit we may never reach: perfect compliance with the norms by which our concepts are defined (Setiya, 2013, p.12).

According to this view, a concept's meaning is wrapped up with certain theoretical norms (i.e. what we should believe, judge, etc.), and certain practical norms (what we should do, how we ought to be moved to act, etc.). Thus, in order to understand a concept, one must "approximate" or at least partially embody these rational norms, and an ideal Platonic grasp would entail perfect compliance with them.[14] For instance, take the concept of "1". Someone who understands this concept must abide by the norms of *theoretical* reason entailed by it - for instance, they ought to judge that 1+1=2. If they did not, we would suspect that they do not really understand what "1" means. Understanding the thick (but not so obviously *moral*) concept of "foolish" also involves adherence theoretical and *practical* norms which define the concept. I ought to judge certain actions as foolish, and an act's being foolish counts against doing it, so if I properly understand the concept I will be motivated to avoid acting foolishly. Analogously, the meaning of a more paradigmatically "moral" concepts like "cruelty" involves (or is partially constituted by) *practical* norms such as "to be avoided". Thus, someone who can competently employ the term in a genetic sense yet is completely unmoved to avoid cruelty does not really grasp the concept in the fullest sense.

If the Platonic concepts strategy works, then the Murdochian has a way to defend her tight link between vision and action and explain why apparent cases of true vision without right motives (like

[14] If we associate a Platonic grasp with theoretical and practical rationality, we might interpret Setiya's reading of Murdoch as offering a defeasible version on motivational judgement internalism, according to which one will be motivated to act in accordance with one's moral judgements *if* one is practically rational – i.e., if one has a Platonic grasp.

the initial chauvinist, the meat-eater, and the bully) are not possible. Right action will not necessarily follow from a lesser genetic understanding of moral concepts, but it will from a Platonic understanding, and it is this kind of understanding which is constitutive of true vision. By definition, to truly see moral reality, I must possess concepts in the Platonic sense, and this possession necessarily involves compliance with the theoretical and practical norms of reason which are "built into" our concepts (p. 13), including having the correct orientation of will (and an *ideal* Platonic grasp entails *perfect* compliance). This being so, before he underwent his deepening process, the chauvinist did not truly understand the concept of chauvinism. He had an accurate *genetic* grasp of the concept, and thus his conception of chauvinism was not wrong *per se*, but it was very shallow and limited. He lacked a deeper understanding constitutive of true vision, which is why he was ill motivated. If he had a Platonic grasp, he would be moved to act rightly. Accordingly, when Paul's understanding of chauvinism is deepened, his motives are altered, and he no longer acts chauvinistically. Thus, despite appearances, the unvirtuous and virtuous are always in different epistemic states - although they might have moral knowledge in a limited genetic sense, the ill-motivated always falls short of a Platonic grasp or true vision (Setiya, p. 10).

4.1. Expanding the Platonic View

Setiya shows that there are different ways in which we can epistemically grasp reality, and that by definition, someone like the chauvinist lacks a deeper Platonic grasp, and therefore lacks right vision. They only have limited genetic knowledge, and this kind of knowledge does not guarantee right motives. So, despite appearances, they do not count as a case of true vision without right action. Thus, Setiya addresses one part of the problem of action - i.e., dealing with cases where vision and action apparently come apart. However, Setiya's account leaves open the moral psychology of just *how* right vision moves us, and how, precisely, the cognitive and conative

aspects of right vision are connected. Thus, part of the problem remains. In the following sections, I aim to provide a comprehensive solution to the problem of action (which I take to be compatible with Setiya's own Platonic concepts strategy) by proffering a moral-psychological account of how right vision and right motives to act are intertwined. Furthermore, my account will offer a new way of understanding apparent counterexamples to Murdoch's link between epistemic grasp and virtue.

Section 5. Seeing Value: Vision and Emotion

In this section, I will suggest that right vision requires (and is partially constituted by) right emotions, and that this gives us the resources to explain how right vision guarantees virtuous motives. As I will argue, we need the right emotions to achieve a true moral vision, because emotions are kinds of evaluative perceptions which allow us to "see" or experience evaluative properties which we wouldn't see otherwise. I will first explain why I take this to be so, and then in Section 6 show how this connects to motivation.

5.1. The Perceptual View of Emotion

The claim that we need emotions in order to see moral reality appears, at first glance, unintuitive. However, I hope that by explicating a particular account of emotions, the connection between emotions and moral perception will become clearer. According to a currently popular and attractive view, emotions can be characterised as kinds of "evaluative perceptions", or modes of "seeing-as".[15] An analogy to our ordinary visual perceptual faculties helps illuminate this idea. Just as our colour vision allows us to see objects as possessing certain empirical properties (for instance, an

[15] See, for instance, De Sousa (1987), Doring (2007); Roberts (2003, 2011); Tappolet (2012, 2016). Alongside these theorists, I take the perceptualist approach to be the most plausible way of characterising emotions. Providing a full defense of the perceptual view, or a cognitive view of emotions in general, is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Sacco (2022) for an overview and defence of a cognitive view and Roberts (1988) for a defense of the perceptual view specifically.

apple's redness), our emotions allow us to "see" their objects as instantiating certain *evaluative* properties.[16] For example, in fear I see a bear as dangerous or fearsome, in anger I perceive an action as blameworthy or offensive, through indignation I see an action as unjust, and through compassion I perceive a person as suffering and worthy of aid.

It is widely accepted by philosophers of emotion (including perceptualists alongside other cognitive theorists) that emotions differ from brute sensations or feelings like pains or itches in their *cognitive* character. Like beliefs, judgements, and perceptions (and unlike brute feelings) emotions are *intentional*, which is to say that they are *about* or *directed* towards an object or target (de Sousa, p. 116). A feeling of pain is not about anything and an itch is not directed. By contrast, I grieve my grandmother, get angry about genocide, am afraid of the vicious dog, and love my friends. Each emotion has an intentional object. Furthermore, emotions also differ from what the Humean takes to be purely conative states (like desires)[17] in that they *represent* the world as being a certain way. If we understand emotions as evaluative perceptions, then just like other kinds of perceptions, and unlike purely conative states, they have a mind-to-world direction of fit and represent things in the world as having certain properties (Nussbaum, 2004). Just as my colour vision represents an apple as red, my indignation represents an action as unjust. Various philosophers have noted that in particular, emotions tend to represent their objects as instantiating *thick*, descriptive/evaluative qualities like unjust, blameworthy, praiseworthy, kind, tiresome, rude, pitiful, cruel etc. rather than thin ones like "right" or "wrong" (Pelser, 2014; Zagzebski, 2003).

[16] Some philosophers have drawn an analogy between evaluative properties and secondary qualities like colour. See, for instance, McDowell (1985).

[17] Note that although Hume takes desires to be non-representational, this view is controversial (some argue, for example, that desire represents the desired object as good or desirable (see, e.g., Tenebaum, 2007)).

One advantage of this cognitive view of emotions is that it allows us to make sense of our practice of evaluating emotions on the grounds of correctness or aptness. We often say things like "you shouldn't be angry", or "he is worthy of pity". If emotions were noncognitive feelings, this would make little sense. But since they represent the world, emotions, like beliefs or perceptions, have a mind-to-world direction of fit and thus are subject to correctness conditions (Döring, 2007, p. 377). They can be assessed on their aptness, depending on whether they fit the world or not. Apt emotions are those which mirror the world, or accurately represent it. If the intentional object of my anger, indignation, or pity really is blameworthy, unjust, and pitiful, respectively, then my emotion is apt. If my emotion sees its intentional object as having a property which it does not really have - for instance, the racist's fear which perceives black people as dangerous - then it misrepresents the world and is inapt.

Another important thing to note about the perceptual theory of emotion, which differentiates it from other cognitive views, is that an emotion is not constituted by a *belief* or *judgement* (Tappolet, 2012; Döring, 2003 pp. 222-3). One can have an emotion without the relevant belief, and have an evaluative belief without the corresponding emotion. For example, someone who is walking across a clear glass bridge at a significant height could believe or judge that the bridge is perfectly safe and that they are in no danger, and yet still feel fear or *perceive* their situation as dangerous. This kind of case parallels optical illusions, where for example, I believe that a stick in a glass of water is straight, yet see it as bent (Tappolet, 2012, p. 218). On the other hand, someone could have the relevant evaluative belief or judgement in the absence of emotion. Another person could notice a crack in the glass bridge and come to believe that it is dangerous, and yet fail to feel fear or see it

as such (perhaps he is under the effects of alcohol, or just apathetic). Since evaluative beliefs and perceptions can come apart, the representational content of an emotion differs from that of a belief.

5.2. The Necessity of Apt Emotion for Right Vision

If we accept the perceptual view of emotions and take the analogy to visual perception seriously, then we should conclude that in order to *see* value, the right kinds of emotions - i.e. apt ones - are necessary. To be clear, on this view, it is not that true vision will always *lead* to the right emotions, such that moral perception comes prior to emotion, and vision and emotions are separable states. Emotions are not responses to perceptions. Rather, *what it is* to see or perceive something as having an evaluative property is (partially) *constituted* by having particular emotional experiences. Without such emotional experience, having the right vision would be impossible. As Pelser (2014) puts it,

> [o]ur capacity for emotion seems to enable experiences of certain 'thick' evaluative concepts that we cannot directly experience otherwise. To experience something as sublime, for example, just is to be awed by it; to experience something as funny just is to be amused by it; to experience something as unjust just is to be indignant towards it (p. 112).

Again, one might compare this claim to the phenomenon of colour perception - just as what it is to see something is red is to undergo a visual experience, what it is to see something as blameworthy is to undergo an emotional experience (like anger). So, like we could not see or experience anything as red without colour vision, we could not see or experience value without emotion.

Zagzebski (2007) makes a similar point in a different way. She claims that particular emotional responses are inextricably wrapped up with certain thick evaluative (or what she calls "thick affective") concepts, just as certain visual perceptions are wrapped up with colour concepts. For

example, the feeling of offence is intrinsically connected to the meaning of the concept "rude", as an experience of red is connected to the concept "red" (p. 112). This being so, she argues that "affect is built into the possession of thick concepts", and thus grasping such concepts requires the experience of emotions or "affective perceptions" (p. 112). For instance, for M to possess the concept of "delightful", which she comes to attribute to D as her vision improves, she must experience feelings of delight. Relating this back to Setiya's theory of Platonic concepts, we might think that it is not only practical and theoretical norms which are partially constituent of the meaning of moral concepts, but also *emotional* ones. Thus, to have a Platonic grasp of evaluative concepts (and true vision) requires that we approximate, in one's emotional dispositions, a conformity with the emotional norms of a moral concept.

I propose, then, that true vision or Platonic grasp in the Murdochian sense requires not only the right beliefs and judgements, but apt emotional perceptions which align with them. The Murdochian should understand someone who sees rightly as someone who necessarily has the right kinds of emotions. This not to say that someone with true vision - who recognises, among other things, that sexual harassment is unjust - must constantly be in a state of occurrent indignation. Clearly, this would be far too demanding. And besides, such a person would actually have quite a distorted moral vision, since there are other components of moral reality which ought to be recognised apart from the wrongness of sexual harassment. Rather, the necessity of apt emotions for seeing rightly should be understood in a *dispositional* sense - having the right vision involves being disposed to feel the right emotions *when one attends appropriately* to some evaluative fact in the world.[18] Thus, as Murdoch claims, paying proper attention to the world is of crucial

[18] This condition of "appropriate" attention is needed, since a mere disposition to feel apt emotions whenever one happens to attend is not sufficient for true moral vision. This would be compatible with someone who failed to ever

importance for seeing rightly. Someone who aptly perceives sexual harassment as unjust is disposed to experience an occurrent or episodic emotion of indignation whenever they appropriately focus on the injustice of it. And someone with a perfect moral vision is appropriately emotionally sensitive to all aspects of reality, disposed to attend perfectly and feel perfectly in general.[19]

5.3. Believing and Seeing, Knowing and Understanding

I have claimed that right and ideal *vision* requires apt emotions. Without them, we would be in some sense blind to moral reality, and thus in an impoverished epistemic state. Yet, this is not to say that one cannot have *any* kind of cognitive or epistemic grasp of moral reality without experiencing apt emotions when one appropriately attends. As Murdoch recognises, someone like Paul could have a genetic grasp of the concept of chauvinism before he comes to see it rightly. Furthermore, someone could plausibly have an even deeper epistemic grasp than a merely genetic one whilst still failing to have the right emotions (and motives). For instance, imagine that a person who was once perfectly virtuous, with an ideal vision of moral reality (involving the right emotional and motivational dispositions), has since declined in character such that he no longer feels or acts rightly. In such a case, this "fallen saint" would seem to not only know the public use of moral concepts, but have some more complex epistemic grasp of the norms wrapped up with them, despite the fact that he no longer has a Platonic grasp.

actually attend, for instance, to the injustice of sexual harassment even when they should, or with someone who attended to the injustice of sexual harassment at the wrong times (imagine someone who constantly attends to the injustice of sexual harassment and feels ever-present indignation which interferes with their life and their perception of other morally relevant features in the world).

[19] This raises the additional question of exactly when and to what one should attend to. I suspect that there will be no clear-cut answer here and that this is a matter for practical wisdom.

Here, it might be helpful to introduce a distinction between knowing and understanding.[20] I take it that moral beliefs and knowledge on the one hand, and moral perception and understanding on the other, can come apart. Someone who has a moral belief genuinely assents to the proposition that *p* (e.g. that sexual harassment is unjust), and someone with moral knowledge has a justified, true belief that *p*. Someone with moral knowledge, in this sense, need not have any of the relevant emotions or motives. Just as someone who is colourblind might know that the apple is red whilst failing to see it as such, or the person on the bridge might know it is dangerous without feeling fear, the fallen saint might *know* quite well that sexual harassment is blameworthy and unjust and that he ought not to engage in it, without feeling indignation or being moved accordingly. However, unless he also has the right emotional perceptions, he does not really *see* it as such. He thus lacks true vision, or what we might call *understanding*.

It is currently popular within epistemology to distinguish between knowledge and understanding as distinct epistemic states, and it is often argued that understanding is more valuable than knowledge.[21] The exact nature of understanding and what differentiates it from knowledge is debated.[22] However, some common points of characterisation include the ideas that knowledge can be characterised as a justified true belief, involves assent to a proposition (Zagzebski, 2001), and can be gained via testimony (Hills, 2009, p. 97). By contrast, many authors think that understanding (although it might also require knowledge)[23], is not merely constituted by justified true belief or

[20] Note that this distinction is not made by Murdoch (or by Setiya). They associate vision (and Platonic grasp) with both knowledge and understanding.
[21] See, for example, Zagzebski (2001), Hills (2009), and Elgin (2009). See Grimm (2012) and Kvanvig (2009) for the value of understanding. The literature on knowledge vs. understanding covers these concepts generally, but here I focus on *moral* understanding specifically.
[22] Hills (2009), for instance, argues that understanding is constituted by a set of skills or cognitive abilities, and Zagzebski (2001) emphasises its "map-like" structure and interconnected, holistic character.
[23] This – i.e., whether understanding must be "factive" - is debated. See, e.g., Elgin (2009). On my view, moral understanding does also require moral knowledge.

assent to a proposition (Zagzebski, 2001; Elgin, 2009; Kvanvig, 2009; Hills, 2009) and cannot be passed on via testimony (Hills, 2009). It is also typically obtained via first-person experience - "[w]e often say that only by seeing something firsthand is how "we really got it" or "it finally clicked" (Sliwa, 2017, p. 548). Finally, understanding is associated with a certain phenomenological character which Grimm (2012) terms "aha!", or "I see!" experiences, such as those we have when we suddenly see the solution to a puzzle (p. 109). [24]

These features are well accounted for by conceiving of moral understanding as constituted by a kind of emotional perception. Emotional vision is more than justified true belief or assent to a proposition (one can know without understanding). Furthermore, understanding cannot be passed on via testimony since although informing someone that (for example) eating factory farmed meat is wrong can lead them to form the right beliefs (and often results in knowledge), it will not guarantee that the person comes to feel the right way. This also relates to the importance of first-person experience for attaining understanding. Sliwa (2017) thinks that firsthand experience is important for understanding because it gives us a richer conception of what the wrong-making features of certain actions are (p. 548). For example, "compare being told that prisons are dehumanizing with visiting a prison yourself. In the latter case, you learn a lot more: you come to know [i.e., understand] that it's dehumanizing by seeing the myriad ways—big and small—in which prisoners are dehumanized" (ibid). In cases like this, I take first-hand experience to be so important not only because it reveals more details or morally relevant features than we would

[24] Here, my association of understanding with right vision *as opposed to* mere knowledge implies an *anti-reductionism* about moral understanding, in the sense that moral understanding is not reducible to knowledge but requires something more (i.e., emotional perceptions). By contrast, both Sliwa and Grimm (2006) are reductionists about understanding, meaning they think understanding is just a certain amount or kind of knowledge. Nevertheless, they still point to differences between mere knowledge (or a more limited form of knowledge) and the kind of knowledge which qualifies as understanding, and I take it that my account can capture these differences well.

otherwise recognise, but because it triggers our *emotional* responses, which in turn allow us to perceive things as manifesting the relevant evaluative properties. When I go to the prison, I come not only to believe that prisons are dehumanising, but really *see* them as such through my emotional experience (of disgust, sadness, and anger, for instance). Finally, if moral understanding is constituted by an emotional perception, this clearly explains the "I see!" moments associated with understanding. When we come to feel rightly, we suddenly come to perceive evaluative properties.

I contend that having understanding in this sense of right vision or Platonic grasp (as opposed to merely knowledge) constitutes an *improved* or *more valuable* epistemic state. When I have the right emotional perceptions, my mind more closely mirrors the world, and I enjoy a deeper and fuller grasp of reality than I would without them. This idea that emotions improve our epistemic status is defended by Nussbaum (1990), who claims that:

> The agent who discerns intellectually that a friend is in need or that a loved one has died, but who fails to respond to these facts with appropriate sympathy or grief, clearly lacks a part of Aristotelian virtue. It seems right to say […] that a part of discernment or perception is lacking. This person does not really, or does not fully, see what has happened. We want to say […] [that this person] really does not fully know it, because the emotional part of cognition is lacking…. The emotions are themselves modes of vision, or recognition. Their responses are part of what knowing or truly recognizing or acknowledging, consists in (p. 79).[25]

Although she does not frame the difference in terms of knowledge vs. understanding, Nussbaum clearly points to the thought that even if one can have some epistemic grasp in the absence of apt emotions, one is nonetheless in an impoverished epistemic position without them. The right emotion is needed for "full knowledge", "recognition" and "acknowledgement", or what I have called moral understanding.

[25] Nussbaum is not herself a perceptualist, but a judgement theorist. Nevertheless, as a cognitivist, she shares a similar view to many perceptual theorists on the epistemic significance of emotion.

I take this kind of distinction, and the idea that emotions deepen our epistemic grasp of moral reality, to be fairly intuitive. Paul, for example, can quite naturally be described as going through the process of enriching his epistemic grasp via his emotional transformation when he attends the workshop. Upon hearing emotional stories of how misogyny has impacted the lives of women, including those he is close to, he comes to feel sympathy for the victims, ashamed of his previous actions, and indignation at the injustice facing women. The experience 'opens his eyes' and provides him with new insight because it enables him to *perceive* the evaluative truth. Although he previously knew in theory that chauvinism was wrong, he comes to really understand it as such via his emotions.

We might also imagine the case of Anna, who has a justified true belief that eating factory farmed meat is unethical - she has been informed by reliable sources about the cruel methods of factory farming, and genuinely assents to the proposition that eating meat is wrong. Nevertheless, she does not have particularly strong feelings about the matter, and occasionally eats meat with little guilt. Then, imagine that one day Anna visits a factory farm herself. She is confronted with the terrible conditions and extreme suffering of the animals. Now, she is overcome with sadness, disgust, and anger, and something changes. Whilst she had previously known factory farming was wrong, through her emotions, she really comes to *see* and understand the wrongness of factory farming. Her world becomes "evaluatively coloured", so to speak. I think it is quite natural to claim that her new way of seeing constitutes an improved epistemic state. We can easily imagine her saying "I thought I understood that factory farming was cruel, but I didn't really until I experienced it for myself". There is an epistemic difference between a kind of dispassionate theoretical knowledge or acceptance of a proposition, and the kind of understanding which involves experiencing something as evaluatively laden.

We might understand people like Paul and Anna as undergoing a kind of gestalt shift (Roberts, 2003, pp. 325-7). Indeed, Murdoch herself describes differences in epistemic/moral perception as a "difference of *Gestalt*" (VCM, pp. 40-1). Again, an analogy to visual perception is instructive. Someone might have a justified true belief that the gestalt figure depicting an old lady and young woman depicts a young woman, yet only see it as an old lady. Then, suddenly, their perspective shifts, and the object of their attention presents itself to them in a new way. Something clicks and they recognise the young woman. As Roberts (2003) observes, it "seems obvious" that such a person is now in "an improved epistemic state. Other things being equal, experience is an enrichment of knowledge" (p. 326). Similarly, when someone has an emotional experience, value in the world reveals itself to them in a new way, resulting in an enriched epistemic standing.

The epistemic value of emotions for Platonic grasp and true moral vision compared to a lesser form of knowledge might also be helpfully compared to the epistemic value of emotions for *aesthetic* appreciation. Various scholars have argued that in order to fully understand aesthetic properties, we need some kind of affective or emotional reaction. Pelser (2014), for example, gives an example of a scientist who dispassionately accepts the proposition that the Rockies are sublime, yet lacks any affective response to them. The aesthetic understanding of such a person, he claims, is "diminished due to the fact that it is not informed by any direct experiential acquaintance with the property" (p. 115). Sreenivasan (2018) makes a similar point, arguing that apt emotions enable us to "affectively register" or "appreciate" certain values in a parallel to aesthetic appreciation:[26]

> [G]etting angry is a means of *affectively registering* or *appreciating* the injustice of the world, and [...] our capacity to get aptly angry is best compared with our capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Just as appreciating the beautiful or the sublime has a value distinct from the value of knowing that something is beautiful or sublime, there might well be a value to appreciating the injustice of the world through one's apt anger—a value that is distinct from that of simply *knowing* that the world is unjust (p. 132).

[26] Sreenivasan focusses on anger, but her point could be applied generally to emotion.

This distinct value, I want to say, is having the right moral *vision* or *understanding* as opposed to merely *knowing* that certain evaluative facts hold. And this deeper, more valuable epistemic state of understanding or true moral vision requires apt emotional responses.

Section 6. Emotional Vision, Motivation, and Action

We are now in a position to provide an answer to the problem of action – i.e., to show just *how* right vision, or a Platonic grasp, entails right motivation to act and account for apparent counterexamples where vision and action seemingly diverge.

Emotions, as I have claimed (and as is widely recognised within the philosophy of emotion literature) are cognitive insofar as they represent the world and have a mind-to-world direction of fit. However, emotions are not motivationally inert states, but also (quite uncontroversially) motivate us to act. Common sense draws a tight link between emotions and action. We frequently reference emotions as motivating reasons to explain how and why someone was moved to act. For instance, my anger moves me to fight back or restore justice; my compassion moves me to help a homeless person; and my fear moves me to fight or flee. Moreover, many philosophers – including both cognitivists and non-cognitivists about emotion—have held motivation to be an intrinsic part of emotion.[27] Emotions, then, are widely agreed upon to have motivating force. Thus, if we accept the perceptual view, then emotions turn out to be *both* cognitive and conative. Against the action-based theorist's bifurcation of mental phenomena, they have both directions of fit, simultaneously representing the world and moving us to change it.

[27] Frijda (2004), for example, *defines* emotions as action tendencies, claiming that motivational change is one of the "key aspects" of emotions (p.158). Deonna and Teroni (2015) also characterise emotions as motivating attitudes, and Zagzebski (2003) calls them "act-dispositions" that are "intrinsically motivating" (p.116).

Since right vision requires right emotions, and emotions are intrinsically motivating, this gives us an answer to the problem of action by providing an explanation of how the cognitive and conative elements of Platonic grasp are connected for the Murdochian. Our true perception of moral reality is constituted by apt emotional perceptions, which motivate us to act virtuously.

The sceptic might wonder whether it is not possible to have the cognitive element of emotion without the motivational aspect. However, this is ruled out by the unified character of emotions. When we see the world rightly, we do not have a cognitive grasp of moral reality which somehow leads to a separate conative mental state, or disparate states with opposing directions of fit which just happen to come together. Rather, the very same emotional state which represents the world also moves us. As philosophers like Döring (2003; 2007) and Zagzebski (2003) have argued, emotions are not artificially cobbled-together hybrid states, composed of distinct and separable cognitive and conative elements. Rather, emotions are "unified" or "synthetic" cognitive/conative phenomena (Döring, 2007, p. 375), in which representational and motivational elements are inextricably entangled or combined "in ways which cannot be pulled apart" (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 104). This being so, it would not be possible to have the cognitive part of an emotion (and right vision) without the conative – an emotion's representational and motivational character are two sides of the same coin. This being so, someone like the fallen saint might very well believe that sexual harassment is unjust whilst failing to be moved, but he does not really perceive it as such – he is in a different cognitive state than someone who sees it via emotion. Thus, when we have the right vision of reality, right motives and actions will follow necessarily.

Moreover, this solution also provides a new way to account for apparent counterexamples to Murdoch's claim, where right vision and right conduct seem to come apart. As Murdoch notes, and Setiya reiterates, someone might have a genetic grasp of a concept yet still act wrongly, since this constitutes a very limited form of knowledge which falls short of a true or ideal epistemic grasp. Furthermore, someone like the fallen saint could have a better epistemic grasp of moral reality than the person with mere genetic knowledge, and yet still fail to feel and act rightly. However, neither of these count as cases of true *vision* without right action. As I have suggested, true vision or Platonic grasp is a form of *understanding* (constituted by apt emotional perceptions) as opposed to mere knowledge (or justified true belief). Although cases of moral *knowledge* do not require right emotions and thus will not necessarily lead to right action, instances of moral *understanding* are constituted by apt emotions and are therefore intrinsically linked to motivation. In defending the link between epistemology and ethics, we therefore ought to switch from "virtue as knowledge" to "virtue as understanding". This being so, we can actually grant the sceptic of the "virtue as knowledge" thesis that knowledge, in the sense I have described, does not guarantee right action.[28] This allows for cases like the chauvinist, the meat eater, and the fallen saint. However, although such people might possess knowledge, they lack the *right vision*, *Platonic grasp*, or *understanding* which guarantees right motives – although the chauvinist knows sexual harassment is wrong, he fails to *see* it as such via apt emotions. And it is *this* kind of epistemic grasp, which as I have argued constitutes a deeper and more valuable epistemic state than mere knowledge, that guarantees right motivation. Thus, my account allows us to show why, in the face of apparent counterexamples, that an enriched epistemic grasp of moral reality still necessitates right motives and actions.

[28] Again, Murdoch does not make this distinction. Although she discusses different kinds or degrees of epistemic grasp, she associates true vision with both knowledge and understanding. Further, she does not distinguish vision from belief. Here marks a particular point where my own proposal departs from her view. Whilst Murdoch thinks belief and knowledge are necessarily linked to desire and will, I take this to be the case only for vision and understanding.

6.1. Emotions and *Right* Action

If we accept that apt emotions are necessary for true vision, and emotions are intrinsically motivating, then part of the question of *how* right vision entails right action is solved, insofar as we have shown how moral vision moves us to act. However, it is an extra step to show that right vision always motivates us to act *rightly*. One might accept that emotions are required for right vision, and yet object that there is no guarantee that even apt emotions (i.e., those which represent the world accurately) will move us to do the morally *right* thing. Psychology, literature, and common sense all recognise that being in heightened emotional states - particularly "negative" emotions like anger, jealousy, and despair - can make us more inclined to engage in rash and potentially morally flawed actions.[29] And we might think that, at least sometimes, these emotional states aren't inapt. Medea's rage towards Jason might recognise his wrongdoings, but it leads her to slay her own children. We might apply this worry to Paul. Imagine that some acquaintances of the newly reformed Paul make lewd misogynistic comments to a woman, and Paul responds with apt anger which rightly perceives the act as blameworthy, yet this anger is so strong that it motivates him to grab a nearby baseball bat and severely injure one of the offenders. Suppose, in addition, that the culprits are much bigger and stronger than Paul, and they retaliate against both him and the woman, leading to further harm. Here, it might seem like an appropriate emotion (and right vision) moves him to do the *wrong* thing. If this is possible, then again we have an unbridged gap between right vision and right action.

I think this challenge can be answered. Firstly, the aptness of emotions is not assessed merely according to its *kind*, but also its *degree*. Someone's anger, for example, might accurately represent

[29] See Cyders & Smith, 2008 for a psychological study on the correlation between emotion and rash action.

an action as blameworthy, but be inapt insofar as it incorrectly sees an act as *more or less* blameworthy than it really is. This makes sense of the fact that one can be too angry, or not angry enough - where anger is the right *kind* of emotion, but it is not possessed to the right degree. Aristotle, I think, gets things right when he stresses the multifaceted nature of virtuous emotional responses:

> [F]ear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity, and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced *too much or too little*, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue (2014, 1106b, my italics).

In the case of Paul above, I suspect that an anger which would move him to severely injure the man would be disproportionate or "too much" - it would represent the act as more blameworthy than it really was, and thus fail to fit the world and not count as apt at all. If this is so, then his vision is distorted, and the case does not count as a case of right vision leading to wrong action.

One might still think that an agent could have an apt emotion of both the right kind and the right degree which resulted in the wrong action. Perhaps, it might be imagined, Paul's anger towards the perpetrator really is apt. However, another thing to note is that having a true moral vision or emotional understanding is not a matter of seeing just *one* thing rightly, but rather being appropriately emotionally attuned to the entire moral landscape. This being so, one's vision can stray far from the ideal when one fails to notice or emotionally attend to morally relevant features of the environment. Recall my earlier point in section 5.2 that having right vision involves being disposed to have the apt emotions *when one appropriately attends to the right moral facts in the right way*. In the case described, Paul's attention might be excessively focussed on the injustice of the action that is occurring. This being so, his vision and emotions are failing to pick up on other morally important features of the situation - for example, he fails to see the humanity of the

perpetrators and the danger that they pose - i.e., he fails to feel something like apt respect and fear. He has what we might call emotional "tunnel vision". Thus, his vision, although picking up on *a* relevant moral factor, is nevertheless flawed. If he emotionally recognised more morally relevant factors, this would mitigate (or at least counteract) his anger and prevent him from escalating to violence.

One might object that having a true moral vision in this sense, which requires us to be appropriately attuned to all the relevant aspects of moral situations, is extremely difficult to achieve. To this, I simply agree. *Perfect* virtue is impossible for us, and even true but less-than-perfect virtue which approximates the ideal remains quite difficult to attain. As Aristotle observes, having the right feelings and doing the right things "is not something anyone can do, nor is it easy. This is why excellence in these things is rare, praiseworthy and noble" (2014, 1109a). And of course, Murdoch herself thinks that the ideal vision which guarantees ideal action is a perfection that we rarely approach and can never fully attain (IP, p. 23). As imperfect beings, our moral perceptions are clouded and our motives and actions are consequently flawed. We must constantly strive to improve our vision - doing so will be an "endless task" and "something infinitely perfectible" (IP, p. 23). This being so, we must continuously work at attending rightly and cultivating our emotional responses, fine tuning our cognitive and affective sensitives to the world.[30]

[30] This raises the further question of how we can change our emotional responses and to what extent we control them. Murdoch thinks we do not have radical freedom to control our vision, but do exert some slight influence (IP, p. 39), and I suspect this is the case for controlling our emotions. But this is a question for another paper.

Conclusion

Murdoch rejects an action-based picture of ethics and defends her own vision-based approach, according to which right motives and actions are entailed by having the right vision of the world. This raises the problem of action - i.e. the questions of how right vision entails right motives to act, and how we can explain counterexamples where vision and action seemingly come apart. I have suggested that by appealing to the emotions, the problem of action for Murdoch's vision-based account of can be solved. As Setiya argues, someone might have some limited epistemic grasp yet fail to be moved, but if they have the right kind of Platonic grasp, they will be moved rightly as a matter of definition. This, I have argued, is because Platonic grasp or right vision requires apt emotions, and emotions are evaluative perceptions or modes of seeing-as which both represent the world and move us accordingly. An agent can know, or have a justified true belief about, the moral facts without being moved appropriately, but unless they have the right emotions, they will fail to *see* the world rightly, and thus lack the enriched epistemic state of understanding or right vision.

As stated in my introduction, I have not aimed to provide a faithful interpretation of Murdoch and I do not claim that this solution is one explicitly offered by her. Nevertheless, I take this solution to the problem of action via emotions to be amenable to the Murdochian and friendly to Murdoch's own view in various ways. As I have suggested, my view is compatible with Setiya's interpretation of Murdoch as positing a Platonic theory of concepts. Furthermore, and more generally, the perceptual view of emotions as evaluative perceptions or modes of seeing-as fits well with Murdoch's central metaphor of *vision*. Thus, I take the incorporation of this view of emotion into a Murdochian account of moral vision to be a fairly natural and fruitful development of her view,

which maintains a fundamental role for perception in moral/epistemic life, and explains the link between such perception and motives to act.

Moreover, the view I have proposed accounts for the Murdochian's rejection of the fact/value and cognitive/conative dichotomy, anti-Humean moral psychology, and posited connection between epistemic grasp and ethical action. Our emotions typically perceive their objects as instantiating thick properties which have descriptive and evaluative content. And our emotions themselves are simultaneously cognitive and conative, with both directions of fit. Thus, although my own account diverges from Murdoch's by claiming that belief alone will not necessarily motivate us, it still holds, contra the Humean action-based picture and *à la* Murdoch, that mental phenomena are not strictly demarcated into either cognitive or conative states - emotions are both. Moreover, we do not require a distinct cognitive state (like a belief), and a conative state (like a desire) to produce motives and action. Emotions are not comprised of independent beliefs and desires, but are unified cognitive/conative states. Their representational and motivational elements are inextricably intertwined. This means (in line with Murdoch) that our perception of moral reality is sufficient to move us, even in the absence of any additional desire. Furthermore, I have argued that emotional moral perception constitutes a deeper *epistemic* state of understanding. Thus, although knowledge as I have characterised it does not necessarily yield right motives to act, understanding does, and Murdoch's posited correlation between epistemic grasp and virtue is preserved.

I also take the view to be an independently attractive one, which can extend beyond Murdoch's view to help defend other "virtue as knowledge" (or, better put, "virtue as *understanding*") and cognitivist motivational judgement internalist accounts in general from similar problems. By turning our attention to the Murdochian metaphor of *vision*, and drawing on current insights from

philosophy of emotion and epistemology, we can shed new light on the problem of action more generally and gain resources to solve it. Shifting our focus from evaluative beliefs to emotional *perceptions*, and from moral knowledge to *understanding*, allows us to account for cases where epistemic grasp and moral action diverge. We can simply agree with the sceptic that the existence of amoralists who *know* or *believe* without being moved is possible. However, they lack right vision or understanding, and it is *this* kind of epistemic grasp which necessarily leads to right motives to act, because it, unlike mere knowledge, necessarily involves apt emotions. This captures the intuition that figures like Thrasymachus exist, whilst maintaining the spirit of the "virtue as knowledge" thesis – i.e., the idea that a full epistemic grasp of moral reality will ultimately yield right motives. Furthermore, it provides us with a plausible moral-psychological mechanic for *how* this is so, giving us an explanation of how a cognitive state can simultaneously motivate us. Whilst many philosophers are sceptical of any necessary connection between *belief* and motivation, *emotions* are widely taken to be intrinsically motivational. Thus, my account helps to defend a tight connection between epistemic grasp and virtue more broadly by illustrating how cognition and motivation can come together.

Ultimately, I hope to have proffered a plausible Murdoch-inspired picture of moral life which refrains from fracturing the world, the realms of philosophy, and the human psyche into dichotomous parts, but rather presents a unity of being where fact and value, epistemology and ethics, and vision and virtue are wrapped up in harmony.

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