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# Moral Perception, Thick Concepts and Perspectivalism

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*Abstract:* Friedrich Nietzsche and Iris Murdoch both argue that perceptual experience itself, not just evaluative reports on experience (*viz.* judgement), can be evaluatively significant, and that the best way of making sense of this claim is to say that experience is shaped by the *concepts* that subjects possess and deploy as situated historical agents with a stance upon the world. This paper examines the implications of Murdoch's distinctive conception of value experience for the possibility of a value objectivism and what is sometimes called the 'absolute conception', which is implicit in many contemporary debates about thick evaluative concepts and in discussions of the interrelationship between Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche in the history of philosophy more generally.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Thick evaluative concepts include ethical concepts such as CRUEL, COWARD, GENEROUS. Such concepts are often seen as "first order" evaluative concepts, which, if we want to say so, pick out evaluative properties and determine thin deontic properties such as rightness and wrongness. As is well known, G.E. Moore held that the thin moral property of intrinsic goodness is neither reducible to, nor constituted by, natural properties, but that it supervenes or is determined by natural properties, and that we know which things are intrinsically good by means of intuition. To many philosophers, R.M Hare and Bernard Williams included (who both hold that thin evaluative concepts

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<sup>1</sup> Aspects of the discussion in this section on the turn to thick concepts in the history of moral philosophy during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century draw on Bergqvist, A. (2016) 'Thick Description Revisited: Tanner on Thick Concepts and Perspectivalism in Value Philosophy', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, The Virtual Issue 3 'Methods in Ethics' ed. Ben Colburn.

are not 'world-guided'<sup>2</sup>) this is too extravagant. They find it doubtful whether any scientifically respectable view of the world can allow properties other than natural ones. Hare sought to make progress with the familiar qualms about Moore's non-naturalism about thin evaluative concepts by drawing a distinction between descriptive and evaluative predicates such that the content of judgements involving thin moral terms is found, not in their extension (which is held to be empty), but in the functional role they play in expressing our belief about the desirability of doing certain actions and not others. Philippa Foot, by contrast, sought to make progress by reversing the order of explanation or analysis between general and specific value-terms.<sup>3</sup> Foot argues that thin evaluative concepts should be understood in terms of substantive value-terms, the thick ones, where the latter are seen as inherently evaluative concepts that, if we want to say so, pick out "first-order" moral properties.

In her remarkable 1956 symposium piece 'Vision and Choice in Morality',<sup>4</sup> Iris Murdoch questions the very terms upon which the argument between Hare and Foot have been premised in a way that calls forth another category that is precluded by the traditional dichotomy between fact and value, between objective and subjective. With a focus on Hare, Murdoch aims to elucidate just why the disputants have gone wrong,

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Williams maintains that thick evaluative concepts are "world-guided", in as much as the thoughts and judgements expressed by utterances involving terms such as 'elegant', 'garish', 'integrity' are candidates for truth and falsity. At the same time thick evaluative concepts are also held to be "action-guiding", in the sense that, as Williams puts it, 'they are characteristically related to reasons for action. If a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason for action' (Williams, B. (1979) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London, Penguin: 140.) Williams' caveat about the action-guidance or practicality of thick evaluative concepts is arguably due to his reasons internalism: S has a reason to only if there is a "sound deliberative route" from S's "actual motivational set" M to (intention to) do the action. On this reading, thick evaluative concepts provide reasons only for those who endorse it (the value it may be used to ascribe) as part of one's "insider" evaluative outlook.

<sup>3</sup> It does not matter for the purposes of introduction what is the precise relationship between predicates and concepts: I will use 'term' to stay neutral on this metaphysical issue for the moment.

<sup>4</sup> Murdoch, I. (1956) 'Vision and Choice in Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 30, 32-58.

which is so much more satisfying than the simple demonstration that they are wrong. Her central claim is that moral disagreement can stem from a difference in *worldview*, questioning the very conceptual foundations of a given moral outlook, a vision of the actual world that shapes precisely what one takes to be salient and not in moral disagreement. Crucially, worldviews are *comprehensive* outlooks on reality, an unruly mix of evaluative and non-evaluative claims in complex interaction as a whole.

Hare's disagreement with neo-Aristotelianism is complex but the feature that Murdoch singles out as the most fundamental is Hare's position that a "conceptual apparatus" is something that one adopts, and that adopting such an apparatus is distinguishable in principle from adopting a moral view, thus construed as a system of moral principles.<sup>5</sup> Hare's view of morality involves a Kantian-like notion of universalisability applied to some prescriptive standard that we hold in a way that allows the speaker to *choose* her own standards, so long as we are prepared to hold it for everyone in principle.<sup>6</sup> Such universalised standards serve as a basis for prescriptive statements of the form "x is good" (translated as "do or choose x"). Foot's attack on Hare is that a judgement cannot be identified as a moral judgement simply on the basis of formal characteristics such as universalisability and prescriptivity.<sup>7</sup> Instead, she holds goodness to be tied to human flourishing; what is common to moral

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<sup>5</sup> Hare, R. M. (1965) *Freedom and Reason*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Hare's use of the practical syllogism differs from that of Kant because, unlike Kant's Categorical Imperative, we are not constrained by what abstract reason allows in selecting our standards on Hare's analysis. For further discussion see, e.g., Beardsmore, R. M. (1969) *Moral Reasoning*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>7</sup> See Foot, P. (1959) "Moral Beliefs", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59, 83-104, and Foot, P. (1961) "Goodness and Choice", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 35, 45-60.

evaluations is simply that all good things are 'of the kind to perform their function well'.<sup>8</sup>

Using Murdoch's conception of ethical vision as (all-encompassing) *worldview*, we can explain the difficulty as follows. Because fundamental moral disagreements may be more a matter of differences in structure of competing visions, one party cannot even see how the other 'goes on' to apply the term in question to new cases, or what might be the point of doing so.

In his recent work on the relationship between Iris Murdoch and Nietzsche, Paul Katsafanas argues that understanding value experience as conceptually structured in perspectival and parochial ways implies a form of value constitutivism. Katsafanas describes the sought view thus:

Perception doesn't just attune us to important features of the environment, but *constitutes* the perceived environment in importantly different ways.<sup>9</sup>

On this view, value is determined by an individual's perspective – determined by the particular cultural-historical "life-world" and other contingencies of the cognitive background conditions that continually structure our way of seeing the world. As such, the concepts that are said to structure our experience must be assessed *genealogically* from within an engaged parochial viewpoint. In contrast, Murdoch's

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<sup>8</sup> pp. 68-59, Foot, P. (1961). In Foot, P. (1972) "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", *Philosophical Review* 81 (3), 305-316, moral evaluations are "hypothetical" in the sense that they serve an end (human flourishing) and will not be considered as reason-giving by those who do not share this end.

<sup>9</sup> Katsafanas, P. (forthcoming) "Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience", forthcoming in the *European Journal of Philosophy*. See also Katsafanas, P. (2013) *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

account of moral value is that moral discernment is a matter of seeing things aright; as she puts it, goodness is 'a refined and honest perception of what is really the case, a patient and just discernment and exploration of what confronts one, which is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certain perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline'.<sup>10</sup>

Scepticism about Murdoch's distinctive conception of value experience as a form of discernment of 'what is there anyway' is often motivated by worries that directly connect with the concerns with G.E. Moore's position with which we started, most famously articulated in John Mackie's<sup>11</sup> and Christine Korsgaard's<sup>12</sup> respective arguments to the effect that the only *real* moral realist there ever was in the history of philosophy is Plato. (Since Plato is allegedly the only metaethicist who has ever understood what moral realism would have to be like for it to discharge its explanatory obligations.) Platonist moral realism postulates a structure of the world that is non-perspectival and inherently evaluative:

- a) It is non-perspectival in that it is not particularly attuned to our human perspective and its peculiarities.
- b) It is inherently evaluative in that cognitive contact with that reality is inherently motivational for a fully rational agent. (Note that this also partly explains the ancient conception of virtue *as* knowledge.)

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<sup>10</sup> Murdoch, I. (1997) in Conradi, P. (ed.) *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, New York, Penguin Books, 330.

<sup>11</sup> Mackie, J. L. (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, London, Penguin Books.

<sup>12</sup> Korsgaard, C. (1983). 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *Philosophical Review* 92 (2), 169-195.

While Nietzsche is sometimes said to be a nihilist, I will assume that it can be agreed on all hands that scepticism about absolute, non-perspectival, value representations *need not* imply a global form of value scepticism: it can instead be relativized to some of our inherited ideas, notably the kinds of commitment that Platonism exemplifies. That leaves the door open for a positive account of other values that do not depend, directly, on a *Platonic* form of vindication. One popular such strategy in contemporary metaethics is neo-Aristotelianism, notably John McDowell's dispositional account of value on a par with a dispositional account of secondary qualities.<sup>13</sup> Other positive "subjective realist" accounts of value worth mentioning at this juncture are Bernard Williams' internal realism,<sup>14</sup> which fuels much of the recent turn to thick concepts in metatethics, and David Wiggins's conceptual realism.<sup>15</sup>

Williams sought to make progress with Moore's non-naturalism about thin concepts, such as intrinsic goodness, by distinguishing two conceptions of 'the world'. The first conception is of the world *absolutely* conceived as 'what is there anyway', the world of scientifically discoverable primary qualities (roughly). The second is the human world, the world of commitments that form part of human agents' 'subjective motivational set' – desires, attitudes, and needs. Thick evaluative concepts occupy centre stage in metaethics due to what has been claimed to follow from them in the wake of the work of Bernard Williams who argues that:

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<sup>13</sup> McDowell, J. (1979) 'Virtue and Reason', *The Monist* 62 (3), pp. 331-350. See also McDowell, J. (1996) *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, B. (1979) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London, Penguin. *Passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Wiggins, D. (1989) *Needs, Values and Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

1. Thick evaluative concepts are “world-guided”; the thoughts and judgements expressed by utterances involving terms such as ‘cruel’, ‘generous’, ‘integrity’ are candidates for truth and falsity.
2. Thick evaluative concepts are “action-guiding”; they are ‘*characteristically* related to reasons for action. If a concept of this kind applies, this *often* provides someone with a reason for action’. (my emphasis)<sup>16</sup>

Williams’ strategy is to distinguish between two conceptions of ‘the world’, one of the world *absolutely* conceived as ‘what is there anyway’; the other of the world conceived as the meaningful life-world of situated historical human agents. Now consider his characterization of the overall theoretical vision in his later essay on moral intuitionism:

Nevertheless, the nature of the shared practice shows that it is the world guided, and explanation will hope to show how that can be. What the explanation exactly may be, is to be seen: but we know that a vital part of it will lie in the desires, attitudes, and needs that we and they have differently acquired from our different ways of being brought into a social world. The explanation will show how, in relation to those differences, the world can indeed guide our and their reactions. ‘The world’ in that explanation will

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<sup>16</sup> Williams, B. (1979), 140. Williams’ caveat about the action-guidance or practicality of thick evaluative concepts is arguably due to his reasons internalism: S has a reason to only if there is a “sound deliberative route” from S’s “actual motivational set” *M* to (intention to) do the action. On this reading, thick evaluative concepts provide reasons only for those who endorse it (the value it may be used to ascribe) as part of one’s “insider” evaluative outlook.



assuredly not be characterized merely in terms of primary qualities; the account of it will need to mention, no doubt, both primary and secondary qualities and straightforwardly psychological items.<sup>17</sup>

As I read him, Williams holds that the idea that concepts such as *cruel* and *kind* are ‘world-guided’ is in fact not based on some appeal to emergence or supervenience or anything like that: Williams’ position is precisely not a new non-naturalism parallel to Moore’s initial account of how all and only things that are intrinsically good form the extension of the predicate ‘is intrinsically good’.<sup>18</sup> Williams’ notion of thick concepts as ‘world guided’ instead turns on considerations about competence with thick concepts within a shared social practice. Many authors engaged in the contemporary debate about the thick have seized in on this aspect of Williams’s account and further hold the view that thick evaluative concepts are *shapeless* and *exhaustive* with respect to the non-evaluative features that ground them:

*Shapelessness of thick concepts:* For any thick evaluative concept, there need not be any corresponding non-evaluative categorization or kind that unifies all and only the things that fall under that concept from one case of application to the next. What unifies all and only the instances of the concept (viz. kind), or what constitutes the real similarity shared

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, B. (1995) ‘What Does Intuitionism Imply?’, in his *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 182-91, 186.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion and defense of this claim, see Harcourt, E. and Thomas, A. (2013) ‘Thick Concepts, Analysis and Reduction’, in S. Kirchin, (ed.) (2013), *Thick Concepts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 20-43.

by all its instances, is evaluative.

*Outrunning ('insiders'/outsiders'):* The nature of the quality picked out by some thick evaluative concept is not determinable without using the concept in question; it is not independently discernible.<sup>19</sup>

What thus emerges is a conception of thick moral concepts as playing a dual role in our moral thinking: Thick moral concepts trace out moral patterns in a nonetheless objective reality and at once guide action in a way that is bound up with appropriately developed ethical sensibilities.<sup>20</sup> On contemporary non-reductive moral realist versions of this claim beyond Williams' internal realism, the "new" non-naturalism, as it were, thick evaluative concepts are (non-Platonically) *inherently evaluative*.

A common view, shared by the otherwise diverse positions of moral constructivism, versions of subjective and internal realism, and Nietzschean constitutivism,<sup>21</sup> assumes that understanding value experience as conceptually structured in perspectival and parochial ways implies that value itself is constituted by the contingent conceptual commitments of one's perspective.<sup>22</sup> Thus, much

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<sup>19</sup> I borrow the term 'outrunning' from Väyrynen, P. (2013) *The Lewd, the Rude and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. See especially pp. 193ff.

<sup>20</sup> Bergqvist, A. (2013) 'Thick Concepts and Context Dependence', *Southwest Philosophy Review* 29 (1), 221-232.

<sup>21</sup> 'Constitutivism' is often used to refer to the view that the nature of value is fixed by the constitutive aim of action. But if I am reading Katsafanas correctly, he does not take constitutivism to imply anything about action having a constitutive aim. (I thank Michael Milona for this observation.) I should also note that Nietzsche's own position is usually referred to as 'perspectivism'. My use of the distinctive notion of 'perspectivalism' throughout this paper is partly motivated by this usage; it does not involve commitment to Nietzschean *perspectivism*.

<sup>22</sup> See Setiya, K. (2013) 'Murdoch on the Sovereignty of Good', *Philosopher's Imprint* 13 (9), 1-21; Katsafanas (2013) and (forthcoming); Lovibond, S. (2009) *Ethical Formation*, Oxford, Oxford University

contemporary work on thick concepts in the wake of the work of authors such as John McDowell and Bernard Williams in metaethics often culminates in the claim that the meaning or sense of the intentional object of evaluative thought is anthropocentric ('subjective'). In contrast, what we find in Murdoch is the robust realist claim that the salient concepts of an individual's life-world can be *revelatory* of value.

## 2. The Way Ahead

My overall aim in this essay is to make good the robust realist claim that the salient concepts of an individual's life-world can be *revelatory* of value without appeal either to Platonism or value-constitutivism. Drawing on Iris Murdoch's model of value experience and moral vision as implying the notion of an all-encompassing 'worldview', my central positive thesis is the claim that the relevant notion that value is always value *for us* be understood as a transcendental condition for experience itself rather than a determinant of the representational content of such experience. Along the way, I draw out the implications of this view for the possibility of a value objectivism and what is sometimes called the 'absolute conception', which is implicit in many contemporary debates about thick evaluative concepts. What the resulting view brings to the table is a conceptual framework that allows us re-consider the evaluative/non-evaluative distinction concerning the way that we think about the significance of the first-person perspective in ethics and the nature of thick concepts as *practical concepts* beyond the polarised dichotomies (between the evaluative and non-evaluative, the subjective and objective) that drive many of the objections to

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Press; Thomas, A. (2006) *Value and Context*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, and Thomas, A. (2012) 'Nietzsche and Moral Fictionalism', in C. Janaway, and S. Robertson, (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 133-159.

robust non-reductive moral realism with which we started.

I begin (Section 3) by examining Murdoch's account of moral perception in relation to the general thesis of cognitive penetrability in the philosophy of perception, the claim that the character of perceptual experience can be affected by another mental state of the perceiving subject. As we shall see, what we find in Murdoch's distinctive account of evaluative appraisal in terms of what she sometimes refers to as 'just and loving perception' is not only the idea of being attuned to one's environment thanks to cognitive penetration through the *concepts* that we deploy, but also the claim that one's *conceptions* of these concepts decisively influence what we see. According to Murdoch's notion of moral vision, when people disagree about moral questions, their disagreements do not partition cleanly into evaluative and non-evaluative categories; it is rather that the disputants' different *worldviews* generate conflicting narratives about the situation.

The upshot of this discussion (Section 3) raises the explanatory desiderata for Section 4: how to understand Murdoch's difficult claim that agents with dissimilar worldviews "see different worlds". What assumptions do we need to add to the presence, or possibility, of variation in narratives and worldviews to make the slide from moral vision to value constitutivism seem *tempting*? I diagnose this as a problem concerning the relation between moral vision and non-perspectival value. I distinguish between two readings of the concept of 'non-perspectival value': an epistemic reading and a non-epistemic one. I argue that commitment to the thesis that value is in some sense always *value for us* does not as such rule out value being non-perspectival in the sense of existing independently of any actual worldviews or perspectives in the non-epistemic sense.

In Section 5 I address the relationship between the parochial and the perspectival. I argue that use of the notion '*variation in perspective*' masks an ambiguity that betrays a deeper confusion between concepts and conceptions in Nietzsche's perspectivism. On my reading, although Nietzsche and Murdoch both hold that there may be irreconcilable differences in competing *moral visions* (thus understood as conceptual schemes) this does not yet show that both authors hold that there is therefore no guarantee that we will arrive at a fully adequate, unproblematic set of *concepts*: the general non-Platonist claim that evaluative claims are 'perspectival' is ambiguous between a number of readings that we should be careful to distinguish.

In developing my positive account of value experience as revelatory of value, I invoke the notion of transcendental narrative structure in moral experience (thus understood as implying an all-encompassing moral vision). I use the idea of narrative structure as an *object of comparison* with the aim of defending the further claim that the emphasis placed on context that is present in both Katsafanas' and Murdoch's accounts of value experience as always already structured by the concepts and parochial sensibilities is best understood as the claim that content-involving (and so rationality-involving) phenomena in human life is inseparable from point or purpose.

In Section 6, I consider the possible objection to the resulting account as to how to account for the notion of structure and unity of moral thought: are there any limits as to what might plausibly be counted as "*value for us*"? As we shall see, this question is especially pressing if we follow through on the argument from the previous sections and take the central target notion of *worldview* to be an unruly holistic admixture of evaluative and non-evaluative concepts.

### 3. Murdoch on Rich Description

In philosophy of perception the general idea of perceptual experience itself being evaluative has sometimes been discussed in terms of 'cognitive penetration', the claim that the character of perceptual experience can be affected by another mental state of the perceiving subject: the cognitive states and characters of perceptual agents can alter how they perceive the world. It also relates to the more general idea that the character of perceptual states is *theory-laden*, in as much as the experiences we have are structured by our conceptual capacities and cognitive background knowledge. Potential cognitive penetrators include moods, beliefs, hypotheses, knowledge, desires, and traits. Thus, to borrow an example from Susanna Siegel, 'it is sometimes said that in depression, everything looks grey. If this is true, then mood can influence the character of perceptual experience: depending only on whether a viewer is depressed or not, how a scene looks to that viewer can differ even if all other conditions stay the same'.<sup>23</sup>

In some cases, cognitive penetration can be epistemically beneficial. This claim has recently been defended by Siegel. She writes:

If an x-ray looks different to a radiologist from the way it looks to someone lacking radiological expertise, then the radiologist gets more information about the world from her experience (such as whether there's a tumor) than the non-expert does from looking at the same x-ray.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Siegel, S. (2012) 'Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification', *Nous* 46 (2), 201-222, 202.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

Moreover, if cognitive penetrability by personal traits is possible we may also elucidate the intuitively plausible idea that having the right kind of traits typically makes a subject more sensitive to relevant features of her environment. Philosophically, the intuitive idea that can be traced back to the ancient moral philosophical dictum that “virtue is knowledge”, which has been the focus of more recent contributions to the literature on moral perception in the wake of Iris Murdoch’s and John McDowell’s respective work. As Siegel puts it: ‘If Iris Murdoch and John McDowell are correct in thinking that having the right sort of character lets you see more moral facts than someone lacking that character sees when faced with the same situation, then there too, your perceptual experience becomes epistemically better, thanks to its being penetrated by your character.’<sup>25</sup> According to this view, a rash person will not perceive the danger in a situation where a courageous person would.

Like Siegel, I find it helpful to think of Murdoch’s notion of ‘moral vision’ in terms of cognitive penetrability. I also agree that the epistemic claim that cognitive penetrability by personal traits (of the right kind) typically makes a subject more sensitive to relevant features of her environment is a good way of understanding Murdoch’s commitment to the claim that “virtue is knowledge”. While this aspect of Murdoch’s position, that adequate moral ‘vision’ may itself be conditional upon virtue, has been much discussed in the literature, I want to explore a rather different and, to my mind, more significant way in which perception can be ethically relevant.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

What we find in Murdoch's distinctive account of evaluative appraisal in terms of what she sometimes refers to as 'just and loving perception' is not only the idea of being attuned to one's environment thanks to cognitive penetration through the *concepts* that we deploy, but also the claim that one's *conceptions* of these concepts decisively influence what we see. While R. M. Hare and others present morality as primarily a matter of *choice*, and treat moral *disagreement* as a matter of difference in the ways in which people 'choose' among alternatives, Murdoch advocates a shift in focus from the concept of 'choice' to the concept of 'vision': a person's conception of salient concepts may restrict, or enlarge (and may focus in one way or another) the range of *options* that she is in a position to recognise as available for her to choose from. Thus, Murdoch wants to deny that the person 'chooses his reasons in terms of, and after surveying, the ordinary facts which lie open to everyone'.<sup>26</sup> Difference, then, for Murdoch, is not just a difference in application of shared concepts, but in the *repertoire* of concepts that different people understand and employ. The key claim is that adequate moral deliberation is conditional upon first getting your initial *descriptions* of the practical moral situation right. Thus, to borrow an example from Elijah Millgram, if you take someone to be distant and aloof, you may be rather 'standoffish' yourself, but 'once you come to see his manners as shy, it will be more natural to be more open towards him'.<sup>27</sup>

As intimated in the introduction, part of the problem of finding the right description in Murdoch is the idea that moral conflicts, e.g., doing the brave thing or

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<sup>26</sup> Murdoch, I. (1997) in Conradi, P. (ed.) *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, New York, Penguin Books), 327.

<sup>27</sup> Millgram, E. (2005) 'Murdoch, Practical Reasoning and Particularism', in Millgram, E. (2005) *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 175.



the honest thing, can be *resolved* by successful re-description (maybe the honest thing *is* the brave thing). The more controversial thesis is that getting the description right is itself an “evaluative” matter for which you are morally responsible, unlike the case of merely “factual” descriptions (like representing the wood anemones in the vase before you as being thus and so).

Murdoch argues for this conclusion at length by her well-known example of a mother who comes to see her daughter-in-law in a new light as ‘refreshingly spontaneous’ (rather than juvenile and vulgar) through an active and conscientious effort to *attend* to the girl and see her “as she really is”.<sup>28</sup> Let us set aside the issue whether Murdoch is right in assuming that such re-assessments are themselves expressions of ‘just’ and ‘loving’ moral perceptivity or if having the relevant vision is itself conditional upon virtue.<sup>29</sup> The important point for present purposes is the assumption that the mother-in-law’s conscientious effort to view the girl afresh in a way that also enables her to relate to her in a more sympathetic way points toward a moral *improvement* of some sort. What we have here is not just the reminder of the importance of keeping one’s mind open so that one does not overlook some interesting *alternative* ways of representing the circumstances. The claim is rather that you are morally required to adopt a critical stance because you could otherwise

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<sup>28</sup> Murdoch herself is a Platonist Realist, but these remarks can be made consistent with a whole variety of views. Perhaps most obviously, the emphasis on activity, conceptual framework, and practical interests lies at the very heart of various pragmatist or ‘constructivist’ positions. But such ideas are equally central (though in a different way) with certain forms of realism and, in particular, the “anti-representationalist” lessons that McDowell has urged on the back of his take on Sellars and Wittgenstein’s respective critical remarks about the mythical Given (which again yield internally different accounts).

<sup>29</sup> Murdoch, I. (1967), 17-19. For a similar idea that adequate moral ‘vision’ is itself conditional upon virtue, see Nancy Sherman’s discussion of moral perception, esp. pp. 28-44, Sherman, N. (1989) *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. See also John McDowell’s (*passim*) vast and influential work on moral motivation and “silencing”.

miss those morally salient aspects that could actually make a difference to the appropriateness of one's practical response. Thus, as Justin Broackes emphasises, Murdoch's interest 'is not just in the phenomenon of *changing one's mind* about a particular case, but also in the processes of *revision*, of development and 'deepening' of moral vocabulary and conceptual scheme ([1964] IP 29/322, 31-33/324-326) and particularly, and most remarkably, in a kind of *privacy* of understanding ([1964] IP 25–9/319–22)' <sup>30</sup> – where the very subject matter of ethics is claimed to be *all-encompassing* rather than limited to overtly "moral" concepts (such as 'duty', 'permissible', or other evaluative standards for right conduct). As Murdoch expresses it in her 1967 *Leslie Stephen Lecture*:

The area of morals, and ergo of moral philosophy, can ... be seen ... as covering *the whole of our mode of living* and the *quality of our relations with the world*.<sup>31</sup>

On the face of it, Murdoch's emphasis on thick description and, more importantly, *re-description* of moral scenarios in perception bear striking similarities with Nietzsche's account of the continuous process of *revaluation*. Revaluation consists in examining the *practical* considerations of a value commitment or concept in terms of whether it contributes to a project that is life enhancing (the value is vindicated), or life denying (the value is discarded). How should we understand this? Drawing on Max Weber's<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Broackes, J. (2012) 'Introduction', in Broackes, J. (2012) *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 12-13.

<sup>31</sup> Murdoch, I. (1967) *The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Weber, M (2002) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Penguin Books, translated by Peter Baer and Gordon C. Wells. Originally published in 1930.

reflections on the predicament of us moderns, Katsafanas argues that Nietzsche's practical orientation culminates in a nihilistic diagnosis that fails to take any existing values as worthwhile ends in themselves. He writes:

To put it in Nietzschean terms: our current perspective, with its commitments to an ideal of efficiency, continually structures our ways of viewing the world and our habits of thinking, such that reflections on the possibility of non-instrumental value can be, for most individuals, only difficult reminders that are not put into everyday practice.<sup>33</sup>

There seems to be a conflation here between value and the subjective conditions for valuation. It is one thing to say that value-sensitive creatures set themselves ends or purposes. It is quite another thing to say that how agents set values as their ends or goals in the course of deliberation about what to do determines what *makes* something a value. The conflation, as Alan Thomas<sup>34</sup> notes, and as Christine Korsgaard<sup>35</sup> pointed out before him, is to run together two separate distinctions: value 'for its own sake' versus 'instrumental' value; and 'intrinsic' versus 'extrinsic' value. The intrinsic/extrinsic distinction applies to values and what *makes* something a value; the latter applies to how agent set values as their ends or goals in the course of deliberation about what to do. If this is right, we may follow Thomas and be open to *complementing* Nietzsche's account of how the free spirits are supposed to revalue

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<sup>33</sup> Katsafanas, P. (*forthcoming*) "Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience", forthcoming in the *European Journal of Philosophy*. [p. 20].

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, A. (2012) 'Nietzsche and Moral Fictionalism', in C. Janaway and S. Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 133-159, 134.

<sup>35</sup> Korsgaard, C. (1983) 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *Philosophical Review* 92 (2), 169-195.

the old values and set themselves ends or purposes in ways compatible with Murdoch's moral realism.<sup>36</sup> We have already the comparison with versions of subjective realism. In what follows I focus on an alternative strategy based on the notion of situated representation (of a certain sort).

#### 4. Concepts and Conceptions

According to Murdoch's notion of moral vision, when people disagree about moral questions, their disagreements do not partition cleanly into evaluative and non-evaluative categories; it is rather that the disputants' different *worldviews* generate conflicting narratives about the situation. Moreover, our occurrent experiences and judgments, particularly about value, are informed by our background concepts and conceptions of those concepts (akin to what the aforementioned *cognitive penetrability thesis* predicts). Moral vision arises out of a total worldview. A narrative like the one we find in Murdoch's rich descriptions of M (the mother in the story) frames the objects of evaluative appraisal, where the framing is a result of selection, prioritisation and organisation not only on behalf of the author but also the participating reader. For example, on one narrative, an individual is described as shy; but on another, as aloof. Because so many different narratives are often possible, some philosophers naturally worry that the narratives are never *revealing* moral reality but only *constructing* it. It is however a mistake to think that radical

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as Thomas notes, we may develop a further account of the 'subject' end of Nietzsche's critique of slave morality: "we we might, as a culture, not fail to find values but, rather, fail to find any values worth setting as our goals or ends. In explaining the latter claim evaluative realism is not repudiated but, again, rather presupposed. However, it is a subjective realism in which conditions on the subject are allowed to enter into an account of the nature of value in a non-reductive way." (Thomas, A. (2012) 'Nietzsche and Moral Fictionalism', 134.)

subjectivism is entailed by the fact of different narratives because these are *conceptions* of the object of inquiry, not the object itself. There is no implication, or so I claim, for the meaning or nature of the object of evaluative appraisal from the fact of different narratives.

One is easily led to suspicion of narrative explanation as a genuine form of explanation by exaggerating the role of interpretation. Taking a leaf from Peter Goldie's work on historical and autobiographical narratives, part of the problem is that the suspicion that putative 'supporting documents for any such particular narrative are "just more text, multiply open to interpretation" motivates the assimilation of narratives and what they are about'.<sup>37</sup> Transposed to the present case, the exaggeration about interpretation is the simple point that all these salient features pointed to in making good some particular appraisal are themselves open to radically open-ended interpretation in line with the individual viewer's experience and, so the constructivist argument would continue, "meaning-making" propensities.

The idea of narrative as *revelatory* of significance can be brought into sharper focus by comparison with Wittgenstein's idea of a 'perspicuous representation' as being a key aspect of the task of philosophy as he sees it: offering a model of comparison that 'earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things' (*PI* §122) in order to achieve a 'clear view' of that which is troubling us (*PI* §133).<sup>38</sup> However this does not mean that there is some single philosophical method through which this is achieved. On the contrary, Wittgenstein presents the philosopher with an *open-ended* range of conceptual tools and techniques that can be used in a variety

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<sup>37</sup> Goldie, P. (2012) *The Mess Inside*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 153-54.

<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (1963), *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. Anscombe, G. E. M., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, paperback 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

of different ways including (but not limited to): offering ‘objects of comparison’ and presenting ‘alternative pictures’; pointing out particular ‘family resemblances’ and ‘neglected aspects’ of our language; grammatical analysis of our use of language in practice, and so on. The real task at hand is to discern which method available to one is the most *pointful* in each context of critical appraisal for attaining clarity and reveal meaning – to which “*whatever it takes*” would be the only answer to give in the abstract.<sup>39</sup>

Now, in terms of what we may think of how Murdoch’s and Wittgenstein’s methods look in practice, one is reminded of Frank Sibley’s notion of “perceptual proof” in aesthetic evaluations.<sup>40</sup> The focus of Sibley’s discussion in his ‘General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics’<sup>41</sup> is Michael Scriven’s scepticism about what he calls the ‘independence requirement’ on aesthetic evaluation.<sup>42</sup> The independence requirement is a demand on rational (aesthetic) thought that ‘we must be able to know the reason or reasons for a conclusion without first having to know the

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<sup>39</sup> The meaning of the notion a ‘perspicuous representation’ is controversial within Wittgenstein scholarship. Read and Hutchinson argue that the notion of a perspicuous representation is not to be understood as a way of seeing things and there cannot be multiple perspicuous ways of seeing the rules of ‘our grammar’; any difference we might perceive between multiple perspicuous representations of an area of our grammar is merely a difference in how they are selected and arranged, something that *can* vary depending on the purpose of the investigation. Whether or not this is the best representation of Wittgenstein’s position falls beyond the scope of this paper. I am inclined to agree with Currie, G. (1993) ‘Interpretation and Objectivity’, *Mind*, 102, 413–28 (who in turn follows John McDowell) that a *representation* (as used in ordinary contexts) that transcends any point of view seems incoherent, but I cannot argue for this claim here. For further discussion see, e.g., Moore, A. W. (1997) *Points of View*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; Baker, G. (2006) *Wittgenstein’s Method: Neglected Aspects*, London, Blackwell; Read, R. and Hutchinson, P. (2008) ‘Toward a Perspicuous Presentation of “Perspicuous Presentation”’, *Philosophical Investigations* 31 (2), 141–160.

<sup>40</sup> Sibley first introduced the notion of a ‘perceptual proof’ in his seminal article ‘Aesthetic Concepts’, footnote 23. Sibley, F. (1959/2001) ‘Aesthetic Concepts’, *Philosophical Review* 68 (4): 421–450. Reprinted in J. Benson, B. Redfern, and J. Roxbee Cox, (eds.) (2001) *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics by Frank Sibley*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001, 1–23.

<sup>41</sup> Sibley, F. (1983/2001) ‘General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics’, in Beardsley, M. C. and Fisher, J. (eds.), *Essays on Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe C. Beardsley*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 3–20. Reprinted in J. Benson, B. Redfern, and J. Roxbee Cox, (eds.) (2001), 104–118.

<sup>42</sup> Scriven, M. (1966) *Primary Philosophy*, New York, McGraw Hill.

conclusion; otherwise we can never get the reason as a means to the conclusion.<sup>43</sup> In its strongest form, the independence requirement demands that reasons must be *logically prior* to aesthetic verdicts (as opposed to temporally prior in perception). Like Wittgenstein before him, Sibley does not attempt a refutation of the sceptic by way of showing the independence requirement could be met. Instead he effectively uses the strategy of offering a 'perspicuous representation' of art criticism by pointing to the way it is actually practiced to show that aesthetic evaluations stand in no need for external validation. He writes:

How a critic manages by what he says and does to bring people to see aesthetic qualities they have missed has frequently puzzled writers. But there is no real reason for mystification. [...] What mainly is required is a detailed description of the sorts of thing critics in fact do and say, for this is what succeeds if anything does; the critic may make similes and comparisons, describe the work in appropriate metaphors, gesticulate aptly and so on. Almost anything he may do, verbal or non-verbal, can on occasion prove successful. To go on to ask how these methods can possibly succeed is to begin to ask how people can ever be brought to see aesthetic (and Gestalt and other similar) properties at all.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, for Sibley and Wittgenstein, there is no *one* method of how we ought to do philosophy, but rather we employ a range of different tools that fit the task at hand;

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<sup>43</sup> Sibley, F. (1983/2001) 'General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics', in M. C. Beardsley and J. Fisher (eds.), *Essays on Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe C. Beardsley*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 3-20. Reprinted in J. Benson, B. Redfern and J. Roxbee Cox, *op. cit.*: 104-118, 115.

<sup>44</sup> Sibley, F. (1965/2001) 'Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic', *Philosophical Review* 74 (2): 135-159. Reprinted in J. Benson, B. Redfern, and J. Roxbee Cox, (eds.) (2001), 33-51, 38.

*whatever it takes*. As mentioned earlier (introductory section 1), a central feature of Murdoch's account of moral vision, in turn, is that the recognition that moral philosophers, when presenting themselves as studying a specific issues in moral philosophy, are in fact always relying on background beliefs about the world that are, themselves, *contestable*.<sup>45</sup>

But what is the analogue conception of *value* that this new way of seeing the matter of meaning brings with it?

What needs explaining is a way in which agents could, as Murdoch puts it, "*see different worlds*". What assumptions do we need to add to the presence, or possibility, of variation in narratives and worldviews to make the slide from moral vision to value constitutivism seem tempting? A crucial constraint here is that the commitment to Murdoch's idea of a difference in comprehensive worldview, and not just mere variation in individual moral belief and preference, should play an important role in tempting us. Recall Murdoch's objection to Hare's presentation as primarily a matter of *choice* that we discussed in section 3, where Hare thinks of moral *disagreement* as a matter of difference in the ways in which people 'choose' among alternatives (and not as a disagreement in competing visions implied by to the concept of 'worldview'). Here is a different way to ask the same basic question.<sup>46</sup> Why might value constitutivism seem *less* tempting on the view that accepts variation but denies moral vision?

Recall Thomas's (2012) remarks to the effect that those who slide from moral

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<sup>45</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see e.g. Wiggins, D. (1989); Väyrynen, P. (2014b) 'Essential Contestability and Evaluation', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3), 471-488.

<sup>46</sup> Suppose that we reject Murdoch's idea of moral vision. This might be because we go in for a picture of moral concepts, thought, and experience more in line with R.M. Hare or G.E. Moore. I thank Michael Milona for raising this concern.



vision to value constitutivism tend to conflate “value and the subjective conditions of valuation” (see section 3). I argue that Katsafanas’ use of the notion of ‘*variation in perspective*’ masks a similar ambiguity that betrays a deeper confusion between concepts and conceptions in Nietzsche’s perspectivism. On the one hand there is the familiar variation in *subjective conditions of valuation*: people set themselves different goals and live their lives in accordance with such decisions. On the other hand, there is a putative variation in the concepts themselves. In sum, Katsafanas’ Nietzschean constitutivism adopts a Kantian story about concepts structuring experience, but rejects the claim that these concepts are fixed and uniform for all rational agents; instead, they change over time. Moreover, he claims that although conceptual schemes can be ranked as better and worse, there is no one best or correct set of concepts.<sup>47</sup>

The last claim is a departure from Hegel who, like Nietzsche, but unlike Kant, argues that the conceptual schemes through which we experience the world, the schemes that on the account *structure* our most basic understandings of ourselves and our relations to the world, are historically fluid. Katsafanas gives us the example of imagining a creature that cognizes things without seeing them as causally conditioned; or, imagine an agent that reasons practically while lacking any understanding of perfect and imperfect duty. These agents would, on the account, have experiences sufficiently dissimilar to us that it would make sense to speak of them as “seeing different worlds”.<sup>48</sup>

Hegel, as Dancy notes, combines this claim that contingencies of the parochial

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<sup>47</sup> Katsafanas, P. (*forthcoming*) “Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience”, forthcoming in the *European Journal of Philosophy*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

may enter into our model of objectivity with a vindictory story about conceptual change: he proposes a method of *stepping back* from the human standpoint in a way such that our conceptual schemes are progressively more adequate.<sup>49</sup> As Dancy explains this Hegelian notion of objectivity, ‘nothing is “left behind” in this process; rather, each succeeding view is retained (if perhaps somewhat altered)’.<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, by contrast, dispenses with this Hegelian story of moral progress, opening us to the possibility that later conceptual schemes might be regressive and impoverished rather than more “refined”, as per Murdoch’s account (recall the idea of moral vision as ‘just and loving’ that was outlined in Section 1).<sup>51</sup>

It is worth pausing to note that, on my reading, although Nietzsche and Murdoch both hold that there may be irreconcilable differences in competing *worldviews* (thus understood as conceptual schemes) this does not yet show that both authors hold that there is therefore no guarantee that we will arrive at a fully adequate, unproblematic set of *concepts*. Katsafanas, by contrast, moves from the claim that the fact that there may irreconcilable differences in our conceptual scheme to the additional claim that value itself is perspectival, that there *are no genuine evaluative concepts* (thus understood in cognitivist terms as picking out genuine properties of things).

Now, recall Nietzsche’s distinctive account of the continuous process of *revaluation*. The central motivation for Nietzsche’s account of revaluation consists in examining the distinctly *practical* considerations of a value or commitment or concept

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<sup>49</sup> Dancy, J. (1993), *Moral Reasons*, Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 144-165.

<sup>50</sup> Dancy, J. (1993)), *Moral Reasons*, Oxford, Blackwell, p. 147.

<sup>51</sup> For further discussion of Hegel’s method as applied to evaluative thought and judgement, see Moore A.W. (1997); and Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons*, Oxford, Blackwell.

in terms of whether it contributes to a project that is life affirming, or life denying. How should we understand this idea of practical agency in relation to the property of *being attuned to our human perspective*, which also motivates Murdoch's claim of worldviews being revelatory of value?

In what follows I will speak of narrative structure in moral experience as making certain reasons available to the agent, where the concept of 'narrative' is to be understood as something fundamentally perspectival. I will use this noncommittal formulation deliberately in order to avoid more theoretically loaded models of the relationship between the normative content of ethics and practical agency, and the general notion of deliberating 'from a personal point of view'. A familiar representative theoretical model of the relation between the moral agent and ethical values uses the idea of agent-neutral reasons for action. This is a standard way of understanding the idea that a reason stands in a special relation to a particular agent or class of agents (see Scheffler;<sup>52</sup> Kagan;<sup>53</sup> and Nagel<sup>54</sup>). However, understanding *point of view* as a determinant of a special class of agent-relative reasons or values that contrasts with another class of values or reasons determined by the impartial perspective is entirely optional, and not something that I myself endorse. Instead, we may think of point of view as an agent's standpoint on an independent reality (evaluative or otherwise) such that the concept of a worldview identifies something

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<sup>52</sup> Scheffler, S. (1982) 'Ethics, Personal Identity and Ideals of the Person', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2), 229-246.

<sup>53</sup> Kagan, S. (1989) *The Limits of Morality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>54</sup> Nagel, T. (1986) *The View From Nowhere*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

that makes value available to an agent's judgement rather than being a determinant of value itself.<sup>55</sup>

A second feature of my use of the notion of moral vision is that the relevant sense of 'narrative' be treated as a transcendental condition in understanding the significance of the first-person perspective, as opposed to a feature of the object of critical evaluation itself. More specifically, in suggesting that value is in some sense always value *for us*, my claim is that perspectivalism be seen as transcendental condition for experience itself rather than a determinant of the representational content of such experience. Here I side with Goldie and Solomon, who warn against confusing the notion of autographical narrative with its intentional object.<sup>56</sup>

According to my thesis about moral vision and the target concept of 'point of view', subjectivity is not a dissociable aspect of our mental lives as embodied agents, but a transcendental pre-condition for all conscious experience. By contrast, other authors<sup>57</sup> reserve the phrase 'sense of agency' to refer to what Bayne and Pacherie,<sup>58</sup> in a different context, call 'agentive judgements'. Bayne and Pacherie draw a distinction between agential *experience* and agentive *judgement* in what they refer to

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<sup>55</sup> It could further be argued that agent-neutral value is incompatible with an independently attractive account of the nature of practical reasoning as reasoning that terminates in action as its conclusion. That will not be my focus here, but I will explore a different route to essentially the same claim in defending my position that discernment is a form of practical rationality expressive of first-personal thinking. See Thomas, A. (2005) 'Reasonable Partiality and the Personal Point of View', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8, 25-43; and Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons*, Oxford, Blackwell.

<sup>56</sup> See Goldie, P. (2012) *The Mess Inside*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; and Solomon, M. (2015) *Making Medical Knowledge*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. Goldie expresses the point thus: "...it is sometimes suggested that life, or parts of life, such as an illness or a process of grieving is a narrative. This is a simple mistake that, I think, often leads to the worry that real life narratives are fundamentally no different from fictional narratives [...]. There can be such a thing as a narrative of a life or of an illness or of a grieving, but to say that a life or an illness or a grieving is a narrative is to run together what is represented with the representation." (pp. 153-4, Goldie, P. (2012).)

<sup>57</sup> Stephens, G. L., and Graham, G. (2000) *When Self-Consciousness Breaks: Alien Voices and Inserted Thoughts*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

<sup>58</sup> Bayne, T. and Pacherie, E. (2007) 'Narrators and Comparators: The Architecture of Agentive Self-Awareness', *Synthese* 159, 475-491.

as the ‘architecture of agentic self-awareness’, which suggests a potential rapprochement between the top-down narrative construction and other low-level ‘vehicles’ for agentic self-awareness. On this approach, while the top-down narrative module has a role to play in explaining agentic judgements, there is a second dimension to the ‘mode’ of agentic awareness located in the very machinery of action production. They write:

Think of what it is like to push a door open. One might judge that one is the agent of this action, but this judgment is not the only way in which one’s own agency is manifested to oneself; indeed, it is arguably not even the primary way in which one’s own agency is manifested to oneself. Instead, one *experiences* oneself as the agent of this action. Such states are no more judgments than are visual experiences of the scene in front of one or proprioceptive experiences of the current position of one’s limbs.<sup>59</sup>

Theorists disagree as to whether such pre-reflexive (and maybe also pre-linguistic) experiences are themselves part of agentic self-hood, sometimes referred to as ‘the minimal self’. Gallagher’s<sup>60</sup> formulation of the minimal model is premised upon a phenomenological account of self-awareness that involves a commitment to what is sometimes referred to as the ‘self-reflexivity thesis’. According to this thesis, consciousness always already implies a tacit form of *self*-awareness; Stephens and

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<sup>59</sup> Bayne, T. and Pacherie, E. (2007) ‘Narrators and Comparators: The Architecture of Agentic Self-Awareness’, *Synthese* 159, 475-491, p. 476.

<sup>60</sup> Gallagher, S. (2000) ‘Self-Reference and Schizophrenia: A Cognitive Model of Immunity to Error Through Misidentification’, in Zahavi, D. (ed.), *Exploring the Self: Philosophical and Psychopathological Perspectives on Self-Experience*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Press, 203–239.

Graham reserve the phrase ‘sense of agency’ to refer to agentive judgements.<sup>61</sup> To forestall possible confusion, because nothing in this paper hangs on the plausibility of the stronger reading of minimal self-awareness as implying the reflexivity thesis, I follow Bayne and Pacherie in using the term ‘agentive awareness’ to cover both readings.

What matters for present purposes in relation to Bayne and Pacherie’s work on the interplay of top-down and bottom-up effects in the so-called architecture of agential awareness is a potential integration of the top-down narrative construction of selfhood and the minimal approach at one point: it suggests that (resistant) evaluative experience are best seen against the background of agency of *whole persons*. Katsafanas’s model of “value/meaning-making”, by contrast, opens the door to something more: to the prospect that we can see value content as *determined* by independently specifiable conceptual frameworks, patterns of attention, or on a larger scale, generic socio-political cultural narratives that are discernible in public discourse. This seems to me to be the central upshot of Nietzschean constitutivism. In so far as the promises of a reappraisal of Murdoch’s account lies in such a reduction of meaning and value to a perspective, it is a new paradigm I think we should resist. And the reason is that we should distinguish conditions on the valuing subject from conditions on the associated value.

## 5. The Parochial and the Perspectival

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<sup>61</sup> Stephens, G. L., and Graham, G. (2000) *When Self-Consciousness Breaks: Alien Voices and Inserted Thoughts*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

So far I have sought to show that we can make sense of Murdoch's claim that worldviews can reveal value without committing ourselves either to Platonism or Nietzschean constitutivism. The suggestion was that moral vision puts pressure on us to have a conception of value according to which what is valuable is not valuable *from the point of view of the universe* but valuable *for us*. Although moral vision on its own is largely neutral to the question of the nature of value, my position is that Murdoch's notion of the concept ultimately fits best with a conception of value that is in some sense perspectival (although not in the radical sense entailed by constitutivism) rather than Platonic. This raises a number of questions concerning the relation between moral vision and the notion of non-perspectival value with which we started.

On my account, the property of being attuned to a human perspective has to do with the nature of value rather than the nature of evaluative thought or experience. It is worth pausing to note the difference between this reading of Murdoch's claim that worldviews can reveal value and an alternative epistemic construal whereby the perspectivalness of value thesis is defined as a feature of Murdochian moral vision. If the central notion of perspective were understood as epistemic in this way, the resulting account of moral vision would trivially rule out Platonism (since moral vision and Platonism would just be defined in incompatible ways.)<sup>62</sup> By contrast, my impression is that some value is non-perspectival just in case it does not depend on human perspectives and worldviews for its existence. To illustrate, if value were non-perspectival, then vision of value would be analogous to vision of objects such as, say, pine trees (e.g., a Scots pine). Pine trees don't depend

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<sup>62</sup> I thank Michael Milona for this observation.

on human perspectives or worldviews for their existence, although our human sensibilities are capable of perceiving them.

Now, on the face of it, if I am right that the notion of non-perspectival value is better understood in metaphysical terms, does it not follow that the concept of *perspectival* value is value that *does* metaphysically depend on human perspectives and worldviews for its existence? No. We can talk of perspectival value in different ways. It might mean that value is fixed by our *actual* perspectives and worldviews, whatever those happen to be. This would lead to a highly subjectivist picture. But there is space for an alternative view. The alternative says that value would not exist but for creatures with perspectives and worldviews, but *actual* perspectives and worldviews can be mistaken. Such perspectival value is *for us*, and we can be better or worse at detecting it. To see this, it is helpful to turn to more theoretically loaded models of the relationship between the normative content of ethics and practical agency, and the general notion of deliberating ‘from a perspective’, in the debate over partiality and impartiality in ethics.

Suppose that all values are eudaimonistic and constitutively connected to human flourishing: there are no values that do not stand in a constitutive relation to a mental subject. One option is to say that content and human-involving interests are interdependent: neither can be understood except in connection with the other. As Alan Thomas puts it, ‘we respond to value and yet everything relevant to our subjective [human] perspective can bear on the process of evaluation and hence what those eudaimonistic values mean *for us*’.<sup>63</sup> Thomas maintains that the correct way to

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas, A. (2012). ‘Nietzsche and Moral Fictionalism’, in C. Janaway and S. Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 133-159, p. 150.



conceive of this value is, indeed, presuppositionally. It does not enter into the truth conditions of an evaluative claim that such claims are relativized to the human standpoint.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, even within subjective realism, there is still an ambiguity in understanding the relationship between us and these facts. Suppose we appropriately respond to something:

- i. Do we react as we do *because the world* is such as to merit the reaction? This suggests robust realism.
- ii. Is the world such as to merit the reaction *because we react* in these ways? This suggests projectivism or quasi-realism.

John McDowell denies both directions of explanation for the class of eudaimonistic values. He says that neither our reactions nor the facts we are reacting to can be understood apart from each other: they are both basic, and *fit* one another. He calls this the No Priority View: we respond to value and yet everything relevant to our (human) perspective can bear on the process of valuing and hence what those eudaimonistic values mean *for* us. As McDowell puts: 'If there is no comprehending the right sentiments independently of the concepts of the relevant [evaluative] features, a no-priority view is surely indicated.'<sup>65</sup> This brings me to a related distinction between value and evaluation, which bears directly on Katsafanas' discussion of genealogy that I discussed earlier (see Sections 1 and 4).

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas gives the following example: "Postboxes are not red for humans; postboxes are red. In the latter claim the perspectivalness of colour discourse as a whole is presupposed' – and similarly for the notion of value relative to our human perspective." (Thomas, A. (2012), 150)

<sup>65</sup> McDowell, J. (1987) 'Projection and Truth in Ethics', reprinted in McDowell J. (1998) *Mind, Value, and Reality*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, p. 160.

Rather than holding that the conceptual schemes through which we experience the world literally structure the intentional object of human thought and judgement in a way that implies that agents with dissimilar worldviews see different *worlds* (because the schemes that shape our basic understanding of ourselves and our relations to the world are historically fluid), I suggest that we may think of conceptual frameworks as *models of comparison*, deployed in the interests of uncovering meaning and value in a way that is perhaps analogous to the very activity of philosophy itself. Maybe the question of what exactly is to be understood in the continuous task of setting oneself goals and living one's life in accordance with those decisions is itself an ill posed question, and that it is this 'dislodging' of ideas that aspects of Murdoch's difficult work endeavours to illuminate.<sup>66</sup> If we may think of ethical and aesthetic vindication as taking on this task (as Wittgenstein does with philosophy), we can also preserve a critical perspective in favour of a purely sociological or autobiographical one.

Such reorientation of focus makes available a distinctive mode of criticism, in which claims to 'objective' meaning *in* conceptual frameworks are criticised not as false *per se*, but as failing to yield the insight about the problem of objective meaning it was the point of those claims to provide. The conceptual framework of one's 'life-world' can reveal (or obfuscate) the object's meaning – but it does not determine the object's meaning. To think otherwise would be to conflate what is represented with the representation.

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<sup>66</sup> This seems to be Cora Diamond's reading of Murdoch, but it is difficult to be sure. See Diamond, C. (1996) 'We are perpetually moralists': Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value', in Antonaccio, M. and Schweiker, W. (eds.) (1996) *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 79-109.

To make good this claim we may follow the basic tactic of Adrian Moore's defence of 'absolute representations', representations that can be added without danger of conflicting points of view, and distinguish between the conditions of the production of a representation on the one hand and 'the role that the representation can play in such process as indirect integration' on the other.<sup>67</sup> The central claim would be that the perspectivalness of the *production* of a representation, expressive of an answerable stance upon the world that (at least in the evaluative case) includes the history of whatever conceptual apparatus that is used in it, has no effect on the stance-independence of the latter.<sup>68</sup>

Just how we should best understand the relation of the parochial to that of an absolute conception of the world is something that I leave open for future work. The claim here is simply that the "producer" of an evaluative representation has a point of view *operative* in producing it; the context of the agent *betrays* a stance upon the world. This preserves a critical stance, in as much as we are now in a position to hold that the route to ethical truth will be stance-dependent, shaped by one's conceptions, and yet think of competing conceptual frameworks as offering different perspectives on the object of inquiry – without thereby reducing meaning and truth to a perspective.

In this section I have argued that the emphasis placed on context that is present in both Katsafanas' and Murdoch's accounts of value experience as always

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<sup>67</sup> Moore, A. W. (1997) *Points of View*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 89.

<sup>68</sup> Moore writes: "One attractive feature of this tactic is that it leaves considerable room for concession whenever anyone insists on the parochial, conditioned, nay, perspectival character of any act of producing a representation. They are right to insist on this, if it is properly understood. Apart from anything else, any act of producing a representation in an *act*, and agency itself is impossible without some (evaluative) point of view giving sense to the question of what to do. But one possible thing to do is to represent the world from no point of view." (Moore, A.W. (1997), p. 89)

already structured by the concepts and parochial sensibilities at one's disposal effectively declares content-involving (and so rationality-involving) phenomena in human life to be inseparable from point or purpose. Katsafanas' Nietzschean value constitutivism was motivated by the thought that the emphasis on point or purpose must presuppose that facts about the valuer enter into the reflective explanation of the truth conditions of ethical claims in ways that render them radically perspectival. But this conclusion is premature: the general non-Platonist idea that evaluative claims are 'perspectival' is ambiguous between a number of readings that we should be careful to distinguish.

In the next section, I consider the possible objection whether the present account can make sense of the notion of structure and unity of moral thought: are there any limits as to what might plausibly be counted as "*value for us*"?

## **6. Thick Concepts and the Unity of Evaluative Thought**

Murdochian moral vision, recall, says roughly that our experiences and beliefs about the world do not partition cleanly into evaluative and non-evaluative categories; and, moreover, our occurrent experiences and judgments, particularly about value, are informed by our background concepts and conceptions of those concepts. Moral vision arises out of a total worldview.

Now consider the following concern. Intuitively, our worldviews give rise to perceptual experiences and beliefs about *ostensibly* non-perspectival objects, properties, and relations, such as pine-trees, causal relations, chairs, and so on. The worry is whether my account of moral vision requires us to radically rethink, say, causation, construing it as in some sense *for us* in the same way that value is *for us*.

This would be an unwelcome result. For the natural answer here is that this is implausible. For example, it seems as if there could be causation even if there were no comprehensive worldviews in my sense; this was the key motivation for resisting the epistemic construal of the target notion. Conversely, on my metaphysical approach according to which some value is non-perspectival just in case it does not depend on human perspectives and worldviews for its existence, if value were non-perspectival, then vision of value would be analogous to vision of objects such as flowers (e.g. a wood anemone). Wood anemones don't depend on human perspectives or worldviews for their existence, although our human sensibilities are (thankfully) capable of perceiving them.

So far, so good. The deeper issue is what, if anything, identifies any (thick) concept as a distinctly *evaluative* concept. The problem here is this. Even if Murdoch's idea that we cannot clearly separate evaluative and non-evaluative categories in the deployment of a worldview is right, we still do seem to be able to identify some things as purely non-evaluative; causation, for instance. What, on the account, could justify such distinctions? Is there room for the very concept of the unity and structure of evaluative thought *as such*?

There are a number of options here. One possibility is to adopt a broadly pragmatist stance and say that a flattened moral landscape is no bad thing; maybe some version of the normative reading Wittgenstein, such as that of Alice Crary, to the effect that linguistic competence is a *moral* or evaluative competence is true.<sup>69</sup> Another option is to work with the particularist notion of a 'default' moral reason and

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<sup>69</sup> Crary, A. (2007) *Beyond Moral Judgement*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

say that although there is nothing *intrinsic* about any feature that makes it a moral reason, this does not imply that we cannot distinguish the concept of a (moral) reason from that of context.<sup>70</sup> A third option is to think further about thick evaluative concepts.

In what follows I will focus on two recent trends in meta-ethics. One is the renewed interest in the non-reductive cognitivist conception of thick evaluative concepts such as *kind* or *cruel* as non-evaluatively shapeless with respect to the lower-level properties that ground them. The second is the preoccupation with arguments in the philosophy of language as applied to meta-ethics, notably the rule-following argument and debates over semantic contextualism. As we shall see, these two trends are not unconnected. What is distinctive about the contextualist version of non-reductive moral realism is a shift in focus from the orthodox view that CRUEL conceptually entails good (inherent evaluation in meaning) to that of semantic under-determination in evaluative property ascription.

The initial worry with the new version of non-reductive moral realism is that the general notion of linguistic competence, which also motivates the *outrunning* thesis that was mentioned in the Introduction, does not seem to capture what, if anything, makes a (class of) thick concept evaluative. In response, defenders of the claim that thick concepts are *inherently evaluative*, and not evaluative in virtue of standing in an analytic or conceptual relation of entailment to some thin evaluative concept, can instead appeal to the claim that thick concepts require an “evaluative

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<sup>70</sup> For further discussion and defense of such an approach, see Dancy *passim*; Bergqvist, A. (2009) ‘Semantic Particularism and Linguistic Competence’, *Logique et Analyse* 52 (208), 343-361; and Bergqvist, A. (2010) ‘Why Sibley is Not a Generalist After All’, *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (1), 1-14. For a different argument to a similar conclusion, see Chappell, S. G. (2013) ‘There Are No Thin Concepts’, in Kirchin S. (ed.) (2013) *Thick Concepts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 182-196.

eye”, sensitivity to human practical concerns, to determine or recognise their instances.<sup>71</sup> Thus, for instance, Debbie Roberts’s (2013) version<sup>72</sup> of the thesis that thick concepts are inherently evaluative is formulated as a claim about what makes a concept evaluative in terms of property *ascription*, where the notion of ‘ascribing an evaluative property’ in using thick concepts is distinguished from Eklund’s notion of a concept being evaluative in virtue of *standing for* an evaluative property.<sup>73</sup> The distinction serves to highlight different ways of picking out the property in question: a direct, non-dependent way, and a parasitic one. Following Kit Fine,<sup>74</sup> Roberts further elucidates the notion of ascribing an evaluative property ‘directly’ in using thick concepts as a matter of latching onto one of its essential, rather than accidental, features given by the *real definition* for the kind in question which again brings us back to the shapelessness thesis, the thesis that what constitutes the real similarity shared by all instances of the concept in question, is evaluative – thus understood as a claim about the *semantic values* of thick concepts rather than their linguistic meaning: ‘evaluation determines extension in the case of evaluative concepts, because evaluative concepts and properties are non-evaluatively shapeless’.<sup>75</sup>

The problem with this tactic as I see it is this. Even if formulated as a claim about the extension (semantic values) of thick concepts, and not just the meanings (or senses), the general notion of *shapelessness* does not seem to distinguish specifically evaluative concepts from other concepts ascribing emergent or metaphysically

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<sup>71</sup> Dancy, J. (2013) ‘Practical Concepts’, in Kirchin S. (2013), 44-59, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup> Roberts, D. (2013) ‘It’s Evaluation, Only Thicker’, in Kirchin S. (2013), 78-96.

<sup>73</sup> Eklund, M. (2013) ‘Evaluative Language and Evaluative Reality’, in Kirchin S. (2013) 161-181.

<sup>74</sup> See Fine, K. (1994) ‘Essence and Modality’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 8, 1-16; and Fine, K. (1995) ‘Ontological Dependence’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 95, 269-90.

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, D. (2013) ‘It’s Evaluation, Only Thicker’, in Kirchin S. (2013), 78-96. p. 87.

dependent properties. If all, or some, thick concepts really verify the thesis that thick concepts can be used as full evaluative judgements on their own and not indicate positive or negative thin evaluative judgement – and this cannot be explained as simply due to pragmatic factors – then one may question whether the relationship between thick concepts and evaluation is a *semantic* relationship.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, as noted above, if a broadly Wittgensteinian conception of linguistic competence as normative *per se* is right, maybe the shapelessness hypothesis is true of *all* ‘higher-level’ artefact and social kind terms and concepts.

In general, and here I side with Pekka Väyrynen:<sup>77</sup> *either* the relevant notion of shapelessness isn't characteristic of the evaluative in particular (maybe it holds for mental concepts and properties as well?), in which case it is not clear why the thesis should carry the sorts of distinctive metaethical implications that get attributed to it. *Or* else the relevant notion of shapelessness (proper) is supposed to be characteristic of the evaluative in particular (*contra* Crary (2007), for instance), in which case it will be a problem for the inherent value thesis about thick concepts if shapelessness can be explained on the basis of more general factors that have nothing in particular to do with being evaluative.<sup>78</sup> The upshot from this seems to be that something stronger than conceptual competence or inquiry is required for the identification of thick evaluative concepts as such.<sup>79</sup> That also seems to be the position of Jonathan Dancy, who

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<sup>76</sup> For further discussion and defense of this claim, see Väyrynen, P. (2011). ‘Thick Concepts and Variability’, *Philosopher's Imprint* 11 (1); and Bergqvist, A. (2013) ‘Thick Concepts and Context Dependence’, *Southwest Philosophy Review* 28 (1).

<sup>77</sup> Väyrynen, P. (2014) ‘Shapelessness in Context’, *Noûs* 48, 573-93.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Reference to Crary mine; see Crary, A. (2007) *Beyond Moral Judgement*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

<sup>79</sup> Similarly Roberts claims that a property is evaluative if it is ‘anthropocentric’, where the relevant notion of ‘anthropocentric’ may further be elucidated in terms of a) response-dependency or else or as b) ‘being intrinsically linked to human concerns and purposes in terms of importance or *matter*ing’. (Roberts, D. (2013), 94.)



argues that we instead understand competence with thick concepts as a *practical competence*. He writes:

[Competence with thick concepts] will be practical competence, since it consists in knowledge of the sorts of [reason-providing] difference it can make that it is here instantiated. This sort of knowledge brings with it the ability to tell one case from another in this respect; *the competence is not just an ability to determine whether the concept is instantiated or not*, but also the ability to determine what difference this makes on the present occasion.<sup>80</sup>

The problem with this suggestion as an articulation of the thesis that thick evaluative concepts are (non-Platonically) *inherently* evaluative is that it seems possible for a non-evaluative concept to require the evaluative eye as well, in which case the evaluative nature of thick concepts is yet to be explained. Take Margaret Little's example of noticing a child alone in the crowd. As Dancy notes, 'while loneliness might be a thick concept, aloneness might not be, and one can imagine saying that it is a non-evaluative matter whether the child is accompanied or not'; yet, for all that, 'the ability to notice such a thing requires an understanding of human practical purposes.'<sup>81</sup> As noted by Siegel,<sup>82</sup> Bengson (ms) gives an example of this sort in an excellent discussion of similar phenomena, where someone gives up their seat on the bus to someone else who is visibly tired (a pregnant or elderly person, for instance).

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<sup>80</sup> Dancy, J. (2013) 'Practical Concepts', in S. Kirchin (ed.), *Thick Concepts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 44-59. p. 58.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Siegel, S. (2014) 'Affordances and the Contents of Perception', in Brogaard, B. (ed.) (2014) *Does Perception Have Content?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 51-75.

Again, even if it is a wholly non-evaluative matter whether some person is visually tired or not, appreciating the *action-oriented* dimension of seeing someone in that state in one's close proximity requires, precisely, the "evaluative" eye for human practical concerns.<sup>83</sup> So how should we understand this?

As we have seen, the revival of the non-reductive conception of thick concepts has gained fuel from arguments in the philosophy of language. There is a presentiment about, that the new version's re-orientation promises to make non-reductive realism about moral properties a more viable meta-ethical position. While I am myself broadly sympathetic to the moral particularist contextualist position in metaethics, I argue that the recent semantic contextualist turn in the literature about thick evaluative concepts masks an ambiguity regarding the relation between competence with thick evaluative concepts and the fact that something is a moral property or reason, which I argue is helpfully elucidated further by clearly distinguishing the issue of what makes something an evaluative judgement and judgements concerning the applicability of given concepts. In my view, to determine whether some thick concept *applies* in a given context of evaluative appraisal is not as such to "make an evaluation" (other than the sense in which, e.g., aesthetic concepts may be seen as 'taste concepts' such that judgement of taste is logically prior to, and therefore can be used to explain, *competence* with thick aesthetic terms). We need a separate argument that speaks to the *practicality* of thick moral concepts as action-guiding concepts (compare worries

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<sup>83</sup> John Bengson (ms) distinguishes the idea of feeling that an action is simply pulled out of you by the situation (in something like the way a reflex might be), from the feeling that it is pulled out of you by the situation, because the situation mandated it. As noted by Siegel, S. (2014), since Bengson wants to distinguish between actions, and reflexes aren't actions, ultimately he glosses his distinction in terms of different levels or kinds of understanding of the situation that elicits (Bengson says "extorts") the action from the subject.

about competence above), and the notion of *action-oriented perception* more generally.<sup>84</sup>

In the context of moral philosophy, Maximilian De Gaynesford argues that reference to the first person – first personal thought – in ethical thinking is of greatest importance in understanding the very notions of ‘rational agency’ (agency that involves responsiveness to reasons) and ‘practical reasoning’ (reasoning leading to action). As he puts it, ‘[u]nless some *situation* is *mine*, I am unable to recognise it as open to my agency or as relating me to various reason-giving facts. And unless some *reasons* are mine, I am unable to engage in reasoning that leads to action’.<sup>85</sup> What is the relation of agency that discloses objects of evaluative appraisal as ‘open’ to me as a responsible moral judge?

What I have tried to do in this section is to offer a new way of understanding the evaluative/non-evaluative distinction concerning the way that we think about the nature of thick concepts in terms all-encompassing world-views. Such reorientation of focus makes available a novel conception of thick evaluative concepts, in which the emphasis on underdetermined evaluative meaning in metaethics is criticized not as false per se, but as failing to yield the insight about the problem of an occasion-

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<sup>84</sup> For further discussion of this issue in relation to the debate over the admissible contents of perceptual experience, see e.g. Siegel, S. (2014) ‘Affordances and the Contents of Perception’, in B. Brogaard (ed. *Does Perception Have Content?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 51-75; Kelly, S. (2010). ‘The Normative Nature of Perceptual Experience’, in B. Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); and, of course, Gibson, J. (1977). ‘The Theory of Affordances’. Reprinted in R. Shaw and J. Bransford (eds.) *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing* (New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum, 1986): pp. 127-1XX.

<sup>85</sup> De Gaynesford, M. (2010) ‘The Bishop, the Chambermaid, the Wife and the Ass: What Difference Does it Make if Something is Mine?’, in J. Cottingham, P. Stratton-Lake, and B. Feltham, (eds.) *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Obligations and the Wider World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 91.

insensitive semantics for the thick it was the point of that move to make in understanding moral properties.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

This essay has critically explored the implications of Murdoch's distinctive conception of value experience as conceptually structured in perspectival and parochial ways for the possibility of a value objectivism, with special emphasis on the so-called 'absolute conception' that is implicit in many contemporary debates about thick evaluative concepts. A popular moral cognitivist strand in the contemporary debate in the wake of the work of authors such as John McDowell and Bernard Williams is the non-reductive subjective realist position that evaluative thought and judgement deploying such concepts be understood as anthropocentric ("subjective"). What I have sought to make good in this paper is the stronger robust realist claim that the salient concepts of an individual's life-world can be *revelatory* of value, without appeal to Platonism (or value-constitutivism). Drawing on Iris Murdoch's model of value experience and moral vision as implying the notion of an all-encompassing 'worldview', my central positive thesis is the claim that the relevant notion that value is always value *for us* be understood as a transcendental condition for experience itself rather than a determinant of the representational content of such experience.

This, in view of the familiar concerns with G. E. Moore's non-natural moral realism with which we started, raised a problem about the relation between moral vision and the notion of non-perspectival value. Against Katsafanas, I argued that commitment to the thesis that value is in some sense always *value for us* does not as such rule out value being non-perspectival in the sense of existing independently of

any actual worldviews or perspectives. I have argued that the converse thesis is unsustainable due to the problems associated with the epistemic construal of perspectival and non-perspectival value, whereby the perspectivalness of value thesis is defined as a feature of Murdochian moral vision. And the reason is that we can still distinguish conditions on the valuing subject from conditions on the associated value.

In developing my positive account of value experience as revelatory of value, I then went on to argue that we regard the salient notion of structure in moral experience, thus understood as implying an all-encompassing ‘worldview’, as an object of comparison. I further made the claim that the emphasis placed on context that is present in both Katsafanas’ and Murdoch’s accounts of value experience as always already structured by the concepts and parochial sensibilities is best understood as the claim that content-involving (and so rationality-involving) phenomena in human life is inseparable from point or purpose.

This raised the objection about the structure and unity of moral thought and judgement as *evaluative* thought as such: are there any limits as to what might plausibly be counted as “value for us”? This question is especially pressing once we follow Murdoch and take the central target notion of *worldview* to be an unruly holistic admixture of evaluative and non-evaluative concepts.

I considered, and rejected, a recent contextualist version of the non-reductive moral realist view of thick concepts according to which evaluative concepts are (non-Platonically) *inherently evaluative*, and not evaluative in virtue of standing in an analytic or conceptual relation of entailment to some thin evaluative concept such as GOOD. Instead, I suggested that we re-consider the evaluative/non-evaluative distinction concerning the way that we think about the nature of thick concepts in

terms of all-encompassing world-views.

In my estimate, what is needed is a separate argument that speaks to the *practicality* of thick moral concepts as action-guiding concepts, and the notion of *action-oriented perception* more generally. Such reorientation of focus makes available a novel conception of thick concepts, in which the emphasis on underdetermined evaluative meaning in meta-ethics is criticized not as false per se, but as failing to yield the insight about the problem of an occasion-insensitive semantics for the thick it was the point of that move to make in understanding moral properties.

Where does this leave us? If I am right, the general notion of *shapelessness* does not seem to distinguish specifically evaluative concepts from other concepts ascribing emergent or metaphysically dependent properties. But does that mean that we should reject the semantic contextualist inherent value thesis of thick concepts in favour of a broadly pragmatist one, or try to assimilate the two? Well, in one respect this is academic – it does not matter what name we give to the resulting theory. Having said this, it is still illuminating to see how putting pressure on polarised dichotomies (between the evaluative and non-evaluative, the subjective and objective) opens up new possibilities in understanding the significance of the notion of ‘point of view’ in value philosophy. The resulting options are either to think that a flattened evaluative landscape is no bad thing, or to develop something akin to the model of thick concepts as both situated and action-oriented that I have here begun to sketch.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> I am grateful to Robert Cowan, Michael Milona and Philip Mallaband for their written comments and suggestions. I have also benefited from discussions of the core themes of this paper with Paul Katsafanas, Susanna Siegel, Kate Manne, Jonathan Dancy, Pekka Väyrynen, Alan Thomas, James Lenman, Simon Kirchin, Michael Brady, Ben Colburn, James Lenman, Fiona Macpherson, Simon Robertson, Sophie Grace Chappell, David Hunter and Constantine Sandis. Earlier versions of this paper

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