Programmme and Abstracts booklet



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**PROGRAMME**

*All times are in CET*

**FRIDAY 4 FEBRUARY**

13:00 **Welcome and Introduction**

13:15-14:30 **Eva-Maria Düringer** (Universität Tübingen) *Murdoch and Weil on Attending to the Personal*

Short break

14:45-16:00 **Kamila Pacovská** (Centre for Ethics, Univerzita Pardubice) *Simone Weil and Attending to the Afflicted*

Short break

16:15-17:30 **Silvia Caprioglio Panizza** (Centre for Ethics in Public Life, University College Dublin, & Centre for Ethics, Univerzita Pardubice) *Attention without self? Murdoch, Weil, and the Zen way*

**SATURDAY 5 FEBRUARY**

10:00-11:15 **Susanne Schmetkamp** (Université de Fribourg - Universität Freiburg) *"In a moment everything is altered" - The Relation between Ethics and Aesthetics in Murdoch’s Concept of Attention*

Short break

11:30-12:45 **Antony Fredriksson** (Centre for Ethics, Univerzita Pardubice) *Murdoch, Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne*

Lunch break

14:00-15:15 **Diego D’Angelo** (Universität Würzburg) *Attention as an Ethical Shaping of a Shared World. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Murdoch in Dialogue*

Short break

15:30-16:45 **Danielle Petherbridge** (Centre for Ethics in Public Life, University College Dublin) *Modifying Reifying Forms of Perception: Towards an Ethics of Affect and Attention with Husserl, Murdoch and Honneth*

**ABSTRACTS**

***Murdoch and Weil on Attending to the Personal***

*Eva-Maria Düringer (Tübingen)*

Iris Murdoch takes the concepts of attention and unselfing from Simone Weil and uses them in very similar ways. In at least two ways, however, she departs from Weil: (1) unselfing does not go all the way, i.e. the end point is not the annihilation of personality, but the reduction of the self to a “smaller and less interesting object“ (OGG: 356). (2) What is personal in other people seems to be a worthy object of attention. Because Murdoch is here, then, less radical than Weil, she encounters problems that Weil does not encounter. Is it ever safe, advisable or even called for to pay attention to our “smaller and less interesting” self? And how can we safely and with a view to the good attend to what is personal in others, and their personal perspectives on the world, without either being sucked up by their fat relentless egos or becoming unbearably patronising? Could we here learn more from the example of “simple people—inarticulate, unselfish mothers of large families”, the cases that Murdoch judges to be “least illuminating” (OGG: 342)?

***Simone Weil and Attending to the Afflicted***

*Kamila Pacovská (Centre for Ethics, Univerzita Pardubice)*

Iris Murdoch’s account of virtue and moral development is based on Simone Weil’s conception of love as attention to the reality of other human beings. What Murdoch does not follow up is Weil’s own ideal of virtue, goodness and saintliness in which the ideas of justice and equality are integrated into that of pure love: a saint is capable of loving every human being equally, even the most wretched one. For Weil, these extreme cases, in which the humanity of the other is invisible to average people, are the critical points of virtue. Weil’s idea of loving the afflicted has been famously developed by Raimond Gaita who emphasises the non-condescending attitude of equality. Yet the question, how, in particular, does the good person treat the afflicted, keeps being asked. In my presentation, I will tackle the question from a different direction, bringing in two aspects in Weil’s own texts that are not usually emphasised. First, I will consider in more detail the obstructions of loving attention, such as aversion and terror, that Weil claims are natural reactions to affliction. Second, I will point out the role creativity plays in her account of attention. Helping myself with a piece by Roy Holland, I will apply that thought to the saint’s treatment of the afflicted and claim that her creative attention is what explains Weil’s claim that “real good is always new, marvellous, intoxicating”.

***Attention without self? Murdoch, Weil, and the Zen way***

*Silvia Caprioglio Panizza (CE Pardubice - CEPL UCD)*

For both Murdoch and Weil, the central correlate of attention is some kind of removal or diminishing of the self. For Murdoch, that is ‘unselfing’. For Weil, ‘decreation’. For both philosopher, there is no attention if the self is interfering. But the nature of such interference, and the consequent nature of attention, are not straightforward, nor are they as similar in the two philosopher as Murdoch seems to suggest.

For Murdoch, unselfing seems to require a less wholesale removal of self than it does in Weil. That is partly to be explained based on their metaphysical background: a secular, Platonic moral realism for Murdoch, and a religious, Kabbalistic cosmology for Weil. Yet Murdoch is attracted to Weil’s radical proposal, an attraction that is most evident in the passages in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* when she discusses Zen: the absence of subject-object dualism in attention fascinates and worries Murdoch.

I propose that Murdoch’s attention and unselfing come close to, but stop short of, the Buddhist idea of not-self (anattā), while Weil’s idea of unselfing, despite Murdoch’s reading, is closer to the Hinduist idea of an individual self that gives up the illusion of separateness and embraces its identity with the universal self (Ātman). Both Zen and Hinduism offer a way to think about the loss of subject-object dualism which seems to be experienced in intense attention. Both address illusion (or fantasy), not only created *by* the self, but *about* the self, and stress how such fantasy has consequences for all perception—including, in our case, what it means to attend and how we actually do it.

Ultimately, however, it is Zen that offers a more fruitful way of thinking about the unselfed attention that Murdoch aims for, and that she finds in Weil… but at the cost of giving up philosophy for Murdoch, and religion for Weil.

***Murdoch, Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne***

*Antony Fredriksson (CE, Pardubice)*

In this presentation I will exemplify a development in which a cultural understanding shifts from one way of seeing to another. I will follow Merleau-Ponty’s and Iris Murdoch’s interpretation of the work of Paul Cézanne and the Impressionist movement in painting during the second half of the nineteenth century. This example provides a description of how attention can be cultivated through the arts.

Impressionist painting, as described by Merleau-Ponty and Murdoch, carries a task of *guiding* the attention of the viewer rather than constructing ideal representations of the visual world. Shared attention is in this way, an effort of guiding the other, and being grasped by the perception of the other, rather than of sharing the same perceptual content. This process also builds on an ethical task of the arts. Without the perception and attention of the other, we are stuck with our individual views, without the possibility of change and plurality in our perception. Both Murdoch and Merleau-Ponty highlight how Cézanne’s attentive gaze aided a whole culture in seeing in a new way.

***Attention as an Ethical Shaping of a Shared World: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Murdoch in Dialogue***

*Diego D’Angelo (Universität Würzburg)*

In the first part of my talk, I will look for a possible bridge between Merleau-Ponty and

Murdoch. As is certainly well known, Murdoch started her philosophical (and literary) career with a monograph on Sartre. I will take a look at her book *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* in search for considerations that could suggest a direct influence. That this could be the case is made clear by the fact that Sartre himself was deeply influenced (of course negatively as well as positively) by Merleau-Ponty. In this context, I will claim that Murdoch is crucially interested in Sartre’s notion of awareness or attention to oneself. In Murdoch’s reading of Sartre, attention brings about an estrangement from the world. In the second part of my talk, I will show that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy conceive of attention as a way of being in the world that is essentially creative. This means that attention needs to be conceived as a way of being in the world that shapes this very world we live in. In contrast to Sartre, attention is, for Merleau-Ponty, something that relates us to the world, instead of enstranging us from it.

In the third and last part of my talk I will show that Murdoch’s conception of an ethical attention can be understood, in contrast to Sartre and further developing Merleau-Ponty’s conception, as the shaping of a shared world. I will attempt to do this by keeping *The sovereignity* *of the Good* always present, but by focusing mostly on some of her novels, where I think that this concept of attention is presented in a strong fashion.

***"In a moment everything is altered" - The relation between ethics and aesthetics in Murdochs concept of attention***

*Susanne Schmetkamp (Université de Fribourg - Universität Freiburg)*

In *The Souvereignity of Good* there is a famous passage in which Murdoch describes how, while looking out of the window, she is caught by the hovering flight of a kestrel. This episode is so important since Murdoch undergoes not only a shift of attention but a change of consciousness: Before, she was in an “anxious and resentful state of mind”. But then, suddenly, “everything is altered”. Instead of continuing brooding she starts admiring the beauty of the kestrel. In my talk I will describe this change of consciousness as a change of quality in attention and perspectives. The kind of attention that is at stake here, or so I will argue, changes from an egocentric one to an *aesthetic* one. The latter is an openminded, non-instrumental and allocentric mode. Furthermore, it has an ethical impact. Brooding implies an inward look with a very narrow focus on the self and its worries, struggles, affects, desires etc.. Opening our view (and mind) to the purposeless flight of a bird in an aesthetic way, on the contrary, requires a broad and wide form of attention, receiving what appears to us. This *aesthetic* attention can have a significant influence on our moral behavior: It can encourage us to take other beings as ends in themselves and be open to their very existence and their concerns independent from our own. The aim of the talk is to investigate such intertwinement between the aesthetic and the ethic impact of attention in Murdoch’s thought.

***Modifying Reifying Forms of Perception: Towards an Ethics of Affect and Attention with Husserl, Murdoch and Honneth***

*Danielle Petherbridge (CEPL, University College Dublin)*

This paper takes its point of departure from Iris Murdoch’s account of ethical attention, particularly in relation to an ethical form of perception that includes notions of motivation and unselfing. The paper moves to consider an alternative account of ‘moral vision’ or ethical account of ‘seeing’ that provides a means to critique and modify reifying forms of perception, specifically those associated with forms of racialization. To this end, it examines the role of affect and attention in understanding habitualized forms of perception in which other persons remain ‘unseen’, drawing on Charles Johnson’s phenomenological descriptions of racialization. The paper further develops an account of attention and affection drawing on the work of Edmund Husserl and Axel Honneth. I conclude by considering the centrality of affection and attention not only in perceptual experience but also as fundamental to phenomenological and critical reflection and how this might provide a means of modifying embedded habits of perception.