

EXPLORATION, PLUMBING, AND OUR CONCEPTUAL LIVES

MURDOCH AND MIDGLEY ON PHILOSOPHY AND ITS METHODS



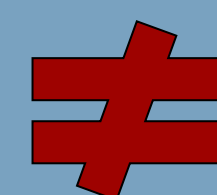
IRIS MURDOCH: ETHICS AS IMAGINATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE MORAL LIFE

- **Analysis and Exploration** as method in philosophical ethics: «Ethics surely is [...] both exploration and analysis» (Vision and Choice in Morality, 1956)
- **Linguistic method** as a form of metaphysics, i.e. the making of pictures of morality, of moral differences, of ourselves, of our world (Metaphysics and Ethics, 1957)
- **vs. logical linguistic analysis** of metaethical theories: interpreted as a philosophical temptation to seek a single form (≠ return to the «data», i.e. to forms of life - cf. Wittgenstein)
- Conceiving **moral concepts** as deep moral configurations (vs. fact/value dichotomy)
- **Circularity in philosophical ethics**: the method of analysis confirms the initial delineation of what counts as «morality» (phenomena, concepts) -> attention to the initial delineation (responsibility)

CONCEPTUAL METHOD IN PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Shared points

- **Wittgensteinian heritage**: grounding philosophy in ordinary life (language)
- **Therapeutic dimension of philosophy**: dissolving conceptual confusions; enriching our conceptual lives
- Understanding philosophical methods that seek unity and certainty (logic; scientific reductionism) as **philosophical (moral) attitudes**
- Rethinking the relationship between **philosophy, science and literature**
- **Responsibility** in philosophical practice



- **Mid-century** analytic metaethics: non-cognitivist moral theories
- **Today**: conceptual engineering (logic; top-down: from theory to ordinary language)

MARY MIDGLEY: PHILOSOPHY AS PLUMBING

- **Philosophical reflection as plumbing**: bringing conceptual confusions to light and attempting to unravel them, replacing and adjusting ideas and concepts, as if they were parts of plumbing, making our conceptual structures fluid again (Philosophy as Plumbing, 1992)
- **Critique of philosophy as a hyper-specialised discipline**: philosophical reflection is not a 'technical' discipline, but combines 'analysis' with the production of new visions, in a way that can be captured through an analogy with poetry and art
- Example of philosophy as plumbing: **Midgley's use of ethology** in her philosophical account of human nature (Beast and Man, 1978) -> ethology as a conceptual resource to better understand ourselves, without scientific reductionism
- **Scientific concepts**: understood within a broader framework of humanistic culture (cf. Murdoch)