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Self and Two Varieties of Self-Loss: Disconnected Moments

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1

In this paper I will investigate two varieties of self-loss, and indicate their relation to methodological problems in epistemology and ethics which have been raised by a number of contemporary feminist philosophers. The question of nonfeminist philosophical sources for feminist epistemology will be of special, though not central, concern. Kant's First and Third *Critiques*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Heidegger's *Being and Time* will occur as examples of such sources.

Arguments in this paper will rest on the following assumptions: (1) "person" and "self" mutually entail each other, but differ in meaning. (2) To be a person is to be a conscious entity; for a person to undergo any conscious state or occurrence is to be actually self-aware and potentially self-reflective with regard to that state or occurrence. (3) Self-awareness is not a manifestation of the disposition for self-reflection, but its necessary presupposition. (4) Self-awareness is an essential, merely felt component of experience, by virtue of which my experiences are necessarily mine. It is strictly private and, therefore, nondiscursive. I shall call it existential awareness. (5) Self-alienation and self-loss are tied to the dichotomization rather than union of those dualities that are essential to being a conscious human person. Human consciousness entails the dualities: I—you; subject—object; inner—outer; feeling—thought; emotion—reason; life—death; finite—infinite; imperfect—perfect; immediate—mediate. This paper focuses on the last two.

2

To refer to an example of a person I use the personal pronoun "I." For me to have an experience is, basically, to be conscious of something other than myself, and to be aware (not conscious) of myself as being conscious. Such awareness is a non-intentional felt quality, essential to every experience. It is the quality which W. James describes as the "warmth and intimacy" that is a necessary constituent of my experience, and, for me, distinguishes my experiences from anyone else's. I necessarily own my experiences. They are untransferable. This is the point that Kant makes when he says that I am aware of my representations as necessarily mine. Awareness is existential and subjective. It is on the basis of such existential awareness, that "I am conscious of the self as identical in respect of the manifold of representations that are given to me in an intuition, because I call them one and all *my* representations, and so apprehend them as constituting *one* intuition."[1] This identity claim cannot be verified in terms of what I call existential awareness, just because this is merely inner and can, therefore, not be subsumed under concepts. Since the unity of self can neither be denied nor conceptualized, Kant (and Husserl) thought it necessary to transcendentalize the self, and thereby make it accessible to rational thought procedures. In Kant's view, for the unity of self to be viable in metaphysics and epistemology, it must be capable of being thought, not merely of being felt (*i.e.*, immediately intuited). When Kant argues that "through inner *experience* I am conscious of *my existence* in time"[2], and that this "is identical with the *empirical consciousness of my existence*" he talks as if, through inner experience, I am intentionally directed at my existence in time, as if "my existence in time" were an intentional object accompanying any other intentional object of consciousness. It is indeed true that I or anyone can determine the individual, to which I refer with the pronoun "I," as an entity in time; but this is to determine me in terms of those properties which mark my continuity in time and, more specifically, those which constitute the

criteria for my identity and re-identifiability in time. This is not to determine my existence in time. It is to determine what I am objectively, not that I am. "Inner sense, by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state, yields indeed no intuition of the soul itself as an object."[3] Furthermore, by Kant's own reasoning, existence is not a predicate.

What I am conscious of is determinate. I agree with Kant about this. To mark the indeterminacy of my mere existence—it can only be felt (immediately intuited), not thought—it would be appropriate to speak of existential awareness, rather than of consciousness of my existence. My consciousness, everyone of my conscious experiences, is rooted in this awareness; but, this awareness cannot itself be consciousness. No consciousness without existential awareness.[4]

Kant is often criticized, especially by feminist philosophers, for dichotomizing feeling and thought and rejecting the former in favour of the latter. I enter into discussion with him not just for the sake of the point, but also to show that, despite his commitment to the duality of feeling (intuition) and thought, he takes important though insufficient steps toward unifying them.

There can be existential awareness without consciousness, if you like, intuition in awareness, but not in thought. These are moments in which I am fully aware of my being, but not (because I cannot be) objectively conscious of it. Kant himself systematically allows for such occurrences in accounting for "aesthetic experiences," "experiences of beauty," in the Third *Critique*. Aesthetic agreeableness belongs "to the subject's sensation, by which no object is represented: *i.e.*, to feeling through which the object is regarded as an object of delight (which involves no cognition of the object)." Nonetheless, the aesthetic experience is communicable:

> The cognitive powers brought into play by this representation [*i.e.*, the representation of beauty] are here engaged in a free play, since no definite concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence the mental state in this representation must be one of a *feeling* of the free play of the powers of representation in a given representation for a cognition in general.[5]

The free and harmonious interplay of my mental faculties constitutes what we may call the "experience of beauty:" am fully alive and present, as I am in myself, as a feeling, imagining, and thinking subject, non-intentionally responsive to a thing other than myself, which is fully present to me in its intrinsic being; I perceive its purposive form without attaching any purpose, cognitive or otherwise, to it.[6]

In the present context I am ignoring many aspects of Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful." What matters here is the account of an aesthetic experience as an occurrence in which the subject non-intentionally and immediately responds to an other entity, so that the subject is fully and freely present in response to a thing (which is not determined in any respect), and the thing's being is fully (unrestricted by any predicates) disclosed in the subject's perception. I am fully and freely aware of myself (my being), and this is unrestricted existential, therefore nonconceptual, awareness. In a moment of a (Kantian) aesthetic experience neither my being, nor that of the object which is found beautiful, is in any way determined. Beauty, strictly speaking, is not a predicate. A judgment of beauty is expression and communication of the free and harmonious interplay of my mental faculties, of my momentarily unrestricted being. Despite its intelligibility there cannot be objective criteria for the truth or falsity of such a judgment. Its truth rests on "a state of free play of the cognitive faculties attending a representation..."[7], and on the mere undetermined presence of an other particular in my perceptual field.

An occurrence of feeling of the free and harmonious interplay of my faculties in the unrestricted presence of an other particular is a *perfect moment*. The characterization of a perfect moment may have to be given a richer foundation than Kant's account of beauty provides; but, we can be guided by it for the time being.[8]

3

In perfect moments I and the other particular (whether inanimate or self) are like Leibnizean monads: nonrelationally, immediately responsive to each other. I and the other particular communicate merely by virtue of our intrinsic being. We are indeterminately present to each other, each appearing from its being, each appearing as it is in itself, an unconnected (undetermined, unrestricted), fully disclosed phenomenon; the phenomenon is the thing-in-itself, *i.e.*, it is seen "in its uncoveredness."[9]

My life cannot be a string of such moments. Only through memory can such moments be entered onto the continuum of my life. By remembering them I change their nature from an occurrence of merely being to (an intentional object of) an experience.

And approach to the meaning restores the experience

> In a different form, beyond any meaning
> We can assign to happiness.[10]

Perfect moments are not points on a temporal continuum; given their indeterminacy they cannot be characterized by temporal predicates. They are in time, without being interrelated on the continuum of time; they are not "involved with past future"[11]. A perfect moment is the moment in and out of time.[12]

Hegel makes the same point. Determinations of the life of personal consciousness by means of concepts and on the basis of general propositions do not capture its (existential) essence. The essence of my or any individual's being transcends conceptualizable relations and distinctions:

> *Essence* is infinity as the *supersession* (Aufgehobensein) of all distinctions, the pure movement of axial rotation, its self-repose being an absolutely restless infinity; [it is] *independence* itself, in which the differences of the movements are resolved, the simple essence of Time which, in this equality with itself, has the stable shape (Gestalt) of Space.[13]

It is in perfect moments that "the *simple self-subsistent existence* for consciousness"[14] is uncovered, and that "the native realm of truth"[15] is laid bare.

> The *being* of what is merely "meant" [Das *Sein* der Meinung], the *singleness* and the *universality*, opposed to it, of perception, as also the *empty inner being* of the understanding, these are no longer Essences, but are...abstractions or distinctions which at the same time have no reality *for* consciousness itself, and are purely vanishing essences. Thus it seems that only the principal moment [*i.e.*, principal aspect] has been lost, *viz.* the simple self-subsistent existence for consciousness. But in point of fact self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*.[16]

4

Self-reflection may (help to) uncover my being (the nonpropositional truth of my being), as concepts may (help to) uncover or conceal the being of particulars in my environment. Hegel speaks of self-consciousness as "the native realm of truth."

> For the in-itself is consciousness; but equally it is that for which an other (the in-itself) is; and it is for consciousness that the in-itself of the object, and the being of the object for an other, are one and the same; the "I" is the content of the connection and the connecting itself. Opposed to an other, the "I" is its own self, and at the same time it over-arches this other which, for the "I" is equally only the "I" itself.[17]

Truth is rooted in "the single self-subsistent existence for consciousness"[18], that is in the self as fully and freely present. Truth on this level is not acquired by any skills for finding truth, but it is immediately given. It is the truth of αποφανσις, of how things show themselves from within their being: as they are in themselves[19].

I characterized occurrences in a human life in which a phenomenon is a thing perceived in-itself (in its intrinsic being) as perfect moments; and, I showed that human life cannot possibly be a string of such moments. Perfect moments are not temporal; they are not on the stream of consciousness. The (nontemproal) life of a bearer of (Kantian) intellectual intuition could be characterized as a string of perfect moments. For perfect moments to be tied to the human context of self-reflection is for them to occur in lives of essential imperfection and finitude.

Perfect moments are, I propose, moments of attention without intention. Murdoch, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, shows that attention is an essential component of both human knowledge and morality[20]. She defines attention as love for the particular. Love is immediate knowledge of the *being* of the particular. Any degree of attention to a particular is that degree of freedom from concepts and explanations, from previously established opinions, beliefs, and knowledge which provide a general framework for the description of the particular. Attention is liberty from intention.

However, intentionality is essential to being a self; therefore, so is (the capacity for) self-reflection. To be a self, *i.e.*, a conscious and self-conscious entity, precludes the possibility of living by attention alone. It precludes the possibility of relating to any one particular by attention alone. Strictly speaking, attention without intention is not a relation at all; it is immediate response to another, by virtue of the being (the intrinsic existential nature) of each other. Complete attention, without intention, to the being of a particular is immediate and complete vision of that particular as being; it is not discursive understanding, not propositional knowledge. It is knowledge by acquaintance which cannot be transformed into knowledge by description. It is not subject to rules. Though completely spontaneous, it is not an intentional act. It is, one might say, a spontaneous imaginative act. To live in a perfect

moment is to be a momentary bearer of (Kantian) intellectual intuition.

Perfect moments are self-less occurrences. I do not mean experiences of self-denial or self-abnegation, *i.e.*, of establishing a hierarchy in favour of other people's needs over one's own. Self-denial or self-abnegation is a self-reflective, self-conscious act. By contrast with self-abnegation perfect moments, aesthetic experiences for instance, are selfless in that I am aware of myself merely as being (I am existentially aware), but not conscious of myself as an object of self-reflection. The self-loss is merely objective, and makes room for complete subjective being. I consequently do not agree with Murdoch's claim that in such moments I "cease to be"[21]. On the contrary. In such moments my being is completely free of its (relational) object-status in the world.

Even though complete attention occurs only in perfect moments, attention is an essential component of all experiences. To reflect on things and to describe or explain them (to tell stories of my experiences of them) entails that they are given, presented in consciousness. In order to reflect on what is given in consciousness I must attend to it, *i.e.*, I must be aware of it as given in my consciousness. This attentional component is necessary for all experiences, and necessarily subjective. To discount this component in one's account of one's experience is to misrepresent one's experience. Even though it cannot be conceptually represented, it must not be dissociated from one's conceptual representation of one's experience. The union cannot be accounted for in terms of objective criteria; but it must be felt.

Attention to any one particular is an principle an infinite process. Any particular constitutes what Milan Kundera calls "the second infinity"[22], the infinity of the being of any individual.[23]

Apart from perfect moments, which are not on the stream of consciousness, attending to the being of an other in the course of my continuous intentional consciousness, does not and cannot amount to attaining a complete vision of the other.[24] Attention is a manifestation of *Bereitschaft* (being prepared) for unrestricted vision (complete nonpropositional knowledge) of another entity, of openness and hope for perfect moments. Such hopes, given the nature of perfect moments, cannot be expectations; for expectation entails intentionality. Such visions, being dissociated from self-reflection, cannot be subject to planning and self-control. They may be sources of energy and new direction of self-determination, but they are not moments of self-determination. I do not determine my existence; I only determine, to some extent, the course of my life.

Not to continue from a perfect moment, to consider it merely as an end and a completion is to discontinue one's life as a self. Such moments of completion must also be beginnings. To want the moment to stay is to forgo the capacity for self-determination, is to forgo freedom. Faust considers himself given up to Mephistopheles, should he ever say to the moment: "Verweile doch, du bist so schon" (Oh, stay, you are so beautiful).[25].

What is essential to ourselves, *viz.* self-reflection in respect of our continuity in past and future, restricts our being. What constitutes my identity does not reach my being.

5

Perfect moments constitute a variety of self-loss. They are perfect merely in the context of an essentially self-reflective life. Such self-loss is not self-determined (perfect moments are not self-determined in any respect). The self-loss induced by recalling them merely as an end and not also as a beginning ("Verweile doch, du bist so schon") is however self-induced.

The self-loss of perfect moments is to be contrasted with what Kierkegaard calls the aesthetic phase of consciousness.[26] This phase (Don Juan is Kierkegaard's paradigm) consists in living disconnectedly from moment to moment—moments which are constituted by immediate, unreflected perception, and unreflected primary desires based on such perception. Don Juan immediately returns from the other to himself, acting not on the being of the other, but on his own unreflected desires. By contrast with Kantian aesthetic experiences, Kierkegaardian aesthetic moments are essentially tied to purpose (tied to impulsive unreflected desire). By contrast with Kantian aesthetic experiences and by contrast with perfect moments in general, they preclude attention to the being of the other; therefore, they preclude knowledge of, and love for, the other. Furthermore, they are dissociated from striving and hope for such knowledge and love. Kierkegaardian aesthetic moments could be subject to self-reflection and self-control. They are self-determined. The self in the "aesthetic phase" of consciousness has forgone such reflection and control; by forgoing what is essential to being a continuous self, he or she has induced self-loss.

Thus we have marked two distinct varieties of self-loss; both entail living in a moment of dissociation from the (self-reflective) stream of consciousness. In Kierkegaard-

ian moments the self does not attend to the being of the other; the other is determined merely by the self's immediate and unreflected desire. The other is an object of intention, not one of attention. The self-loss of intention without attention is tantamount to the self's disconnection from the other as independently being; it entails the renunciation of self-reflectiveness, and thereby, breaks the self's continuity. On the other hand, perfect moments, as shown, are moments of attention without intention through which we may be able to enhance our consciousness and our capacity for self-determination.

Aesthetic moments *à la* Kierkegaard are moments of disconnection from the being of others. In such moments the other is exclusively determined by the perceiver's intention/desire, not by the being of the other. Thus the perceiver is disconnected from the other. If this is the pattern of the perceiver's life, he or she does not live as a self. If he or she succeeds in determining other selves by his or her intentions and thus prevents others from self-determination, he or she induces self-loss in others as well. This is the pattern of the Hegelian master/slave situation. The master is unjust not primarily, if at all, because he or she breaks principles of justice laid down in a moral code, but because he or she does not do justice to the being of the other. To do justice to the being of another self, by attention, is to refrain from using the other self as a means. I am not, however, saying that attention precludes interest in the other self, for instance in the other self's capacity and skills. It does not preclude concerns as to how the other can help me; in short, it does not preclude interaction and cooperativeness, as long as interaction and cooperativeness further and do not diminish the being of a self. I can ask you to fulfill tasks for me, as long as I do not sever your capacity to fulfill this task for me from the context of your being; I cannot insist that you fulfill tasks for me.

I may, on the other hand, do justice to the being of an inanimate, "functional" thing, if I use it as a means to fulfill functions according to my purposes. If I use it merely exclusively according to my purposes, without attention to its being, then I fail to do it justice. To misuse a thing is a failure to do justice to its being. I do not do justice to my table-lamp if I use it to put a nail in the wall. Any purpose precludes perfect justice to a thing, because purposes entail intentionality. Perfect justice to an inanimate thing consists in a Kantian aesthetic experience, an occurrence of full attention without intention: I am free of any purpose whatsoever in the face of the intrinsic purposiveness of the thing. However, such aesthetic experiences are perfect moments. They can strengthen and enhance my capacity for giving attention to the being of things in the course of my life, that is, in intentional contexts. Aesthetic experiences are "not the most important place of moral change," but "the most accessible one"[27].

According to Heidegger, to be a self "Dasein," is to be "circumspectively related" in one's environment. The primary mode of such relatedness is "Sorge," care, that is the striving to interconnect with entities in one's environment according to their being. Functional things are "Zeug," present-at-hand by virtue of their intrinsic purposive being. To use them in greatest possible justice to their being is to know them, to bring them "ready-to-hand." To relate to selves in greatest possible justice to their being is not to use them. It is to interconnect with them in mutual recognition as selves. Knowledge of the other entails caring for the being of the other. "Care" is the union of attention and intention which is optimally conducive to the correct vision of a being, and to moral action.

6

Perfect moments are moments of illumination regarding my being and the being of other particulars. Remembered, such moments can become sources of increased knowledge of my being and the being of others, and, therefore, of increased justice towards others and myself. Perfect moments are timeless moments of attention without intention, of being fully and freely oneself, in immediate response to the being of an other entity. They preclude self-reflection and are, therefore, moments of objective self-loss. This is a variety of self-loss which may enhance my consciousness in time and my capacity for attending to my and others' being in time when attention must be inseparably tied to intention. In other words, it may enhance my capacity for accurate vision of particulars, *i.e.*, for knowledge of particulars which includes caring. Caring, I take it, consists in justice to the being of a particular, rather than justice merely by principles. The self-loss of perfect moments may enhance my moral freedom.

Disconnected moments of intention without attention, Kierkegaardian aesthetics moments, are also without self-reflection. They occur on the continuum of consciousness, in time. The self, *e.g.*, Don Juan, disconnects himself from others by letting others be determined merely by his unreflected desires. Consequently, he diminishes his own being and moves toward self-loss, the loss of being a self.

NOTES

1. *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, B 135.
2. *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, B XL.
3. *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, A 23.

4. The "Anticipations of Perception," as well as parts of the "Transcendental Aesthetic" in *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* support this view of mine even more strongly. B34/A30; B207/208 A167/B209.
5. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, I, paragraph 9, p. 58.
6. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, I. especially paragraphs 8-11, p. 53-63.
7. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, I, p. 58.
8. I borrow the term "perfect moment" from Anny, the female protagonist in Sartre's *Nausea*,

   "And the perfect moments? Where do they come in?" "They come afterwards. First there are annunciatory signs. Then the privileged situation, slowly, majestically, comes into people's lives. Then the question whether you want to make a perfect moment out of it."

   "Yes," I say, "I understand. In each one of these privileged situations there are certain acts which have to be done, certain attitudes to be taken, words which must be said—and other attitudes, other words are strictly prohibited. Is that it?"

   "I suppose so..."

   "In fact, then, the situation is the material: it demands exploitation."

   'That's it," she says. "First you had to be plunged into something exceptional and feel as though you were putting it in order. If all those conditions had been realized, the moment would have been perfect."

   "In fact, it was a sort of work of art."

   "You've already said that," she says with irritation.

   "No: it was...a duty. You had to transform privileged situations into perfect moments. It was a moral question. Yes, you can laugh if you like: it was moral." (Sartre, p. 148)

   Anny makes the mistake of thinking that a perfect moment can be created, made, like a work of art (Sartre, p. 147). This is why she must conclude, "I outlive myself" (Sartre, p. 144). Roquentin's discovery of existence comes closer to a perfect moment.

   Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance: it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast—or else there is nothing more at all. (Sartre, p. 132)

   Existence is without memory; of the vanished it retains nothing—not even a memory. Existence everywhere, infinitely, in excell, for ever and everywhere; existence —which is limited only by existence. (Sartre, p. 133)

   Given that experiences combine immediate felt (subjective) qualities and mediate, reflective (conceptual, objective) factors, a perfect moment is not, strictly speaking, an experience. Such moments, contrary to Anny's view, cannot be expected, planned or attained according to rules or skills. They *are* indeterminate.
9. Heidegger, pp. 260-164.
10. Eliot, "Four Quartets," p. 208.
11. Eliot, p. 192.
12. For most of us, there is only the unattended
    Moment, the moment in and out of time,
    The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
    The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
    Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
    That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
    While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
    Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
    Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
    The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
    Here the impossible union
    Of spheres of existence is actual,
    Here the past and future
    Are conquered, and reconciled,

    Eliot, pp. 212-132
13. Hegel, p. 106. This can be read as an account of what Kant means by pure intuition of Time (by contrast with Time as a pure form of intuition).
14. Hegel, p. 105.
15. Hegel, p. 104.
16. Hegel, pp. 104-105.
17. Hegel, p. 104.
18. Hegel, p. 105.
19. Heidegger, pp. 261-263.
20. Murdoch, pp. 40-42, 54-56.
21. Murdoch, p. 59.
22. Kundera, p. 203.
23. What Beethoven discovered in his variations was another space and another direction. In that sense they are a challenge to undertake the journey, another invitation au voyage.
    The variation form is the form of maximum concentration. It enables the composer to limit himself to the matter at hand, to go straight to the heart of it. The subject matter is a theme, which often consists of no more than sixteen measures. Beethoven goes as deeply into those sixteen measures as if he had gone down a mine to the bowels of the earth.

    The journey to the second infinity is no less adventurous than the journey of the epic, and closely parallels the physicist's descent into the wondrous innards of the atom. With every variation Beethoven moves farther and farther from the original theme, which bears no more resemblance to the final variation than a flower to its image under the microscope.

    Man knows he cannot embrace the universe with all its suns and stars. But he finds it unbearable to be condemned to lose the second infinity as well, the one so close, so nearly within reach. Tamina lost the infinity of her love, I lost my father, we all lose in whatever we do, because if it is perfection we are after, we must go to the heart of the matter, and we can never quite reach it.

    That the external infinity escapes us we accept with equanimity; the guilt over letting the second infinity escape follows us to the grave. While pondering the infinity of the stars, we ignore the infinity of our father.

    It is no wonder, then, that the variation form became the passion of the mature Beethoven, who (like Tamina and like me) knew all too well that there is nothing more unbearable than losing a person we have loved—those sixteen measures and the inner universe of the infinite possibilities.

    Kundera, pp. 164-165
24. Attention is constitutive of human freedom, of moral choice and responsibility.

    Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action. (Murdoch, p. 67).

    Compare also Murdoch (p. 91):

    Human beings are far more complicated and enigmatic and ambiguous than language and mathematical concepts, and selfishness operates in a much more devious and frenzied manner in our relations with them. Ignorance, muddle, fear, wishful thinking, lack of tests often make us feel that moral choice is something arbitrary, a matter for personal will rather than for attentive study. Our attachments tend to be selfish and strong, and the transformation of our lives from selfishness to unselfishness is sometimes hard even to conceive of. Yet is the situation really so different? Should a retarded child be kept at home or sent to an institution? Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for asked to be away? Should an unhappy marriage be continued for the sake of the children? Should I leave my family

in order to do political work? Should I neglect them in order to practise my art? The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really looking. The difficulty is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy and despair. The refusal to attend may even induce a fictitious sense of freedom: I may as well toss a coin. Of course virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a task to come to see the world as it is.

25. Goethe, pp. 104, 105.
26. cp. S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.
27. Murdoch, p. 85.

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Prayer - for Joan

What do you think J? We've done pretty well, I suppose;
we've managed this far pretty easily,
when you consider....

Sarah T.
with her secret abortion
out of town

& Mo with her illness
which everyone refuses to call
a nervous breakdown

& Marsha whose Mother's
about to die (the Big C, I think
but no one will say)

& Jane, whose man
just up and went
away

& and Andrea? Allison?
-something like that-
your friend who's now
a whore

& Astrid
onto her second child
with a man she doesn't know
anymore

Our own little troubles—Cystitis, the body's revenge
Moralistic Old Bitch that she is—are really quite small
retribution (for being women).

But worry not, these murmurings,
these tiny beads of discontent,
these small hard pellets of rose petals—crushed
then rolled through anxious finger,
strung together, knotted in between—
these countless, counting, counters; sacred sores,
these shibboleths
(" Ye will know them by their grievances")
are but
the beads
of one lone
woman's
rosary

and many more
with follow these,
throught the Decades,
each ensconced between
the Paternosters

and the
Glorias...

Kate Campbell
England