

(women) IN PARENTHESIS

Online Seminar Series 2025-6

In Parenthesis is a Research Centre that supports scholarly work, philosophical engagement and projects on the [Wartime Quartet](#) of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch as well as [connected figures](#) such as Dorothy Emmet, Donald MacKinnon, Julius Kovesi and Heinz Cassirer. We are bringing to light an alternative stream of metaphysical and moral thinking in twentieth century philosophy and mapping its legacy today. If you would like to get involved, or be kept informed about the activities of In Parenthesis, please do join our research network, it's called [Mapping The Quartet](#) (we send an email every 6 months or so)

We are excited to announce our 2025-6 Online Seminar Series! Please do join us online for some promising talks and discussion of themes related to the (women) In Parenthesis project. All talks are scheduled for 3pm-4.30pm UK time, and the Zoom link, plus abstracts, will appear on this document, and will be circulated to our network, closer to the time.

All talks will be held 3pm-4.30pm UK time.

Join via this zoom:

<https://zoom.us/j/91391091203?pwd=wXUGpcGflTvlc5Gqymb8yVK3JEUsAL.1>

SCHEDULE:

1. October 22nd, Wednesday: **Nat Dyer**, 'Mary Midgley amongst the Economists'
2. December 17th, Wednesday, Christmas Special: **Larry Blum**, 'Iris Murdoch, Dorothy Emmet, and Bernard Williams: Convergences and Divergences in Counter-Traditions in 20th Century British Moral Philosophy'
3. February 18th, Wednesday: **Dominic Lash**, 'Intention in Film after Anscombe'
4. April 15th, Wednesday: **Molly Bellamy**, 'The Divine in Iris Murdoch's Novels'

5. June 17th, Wednesday: **Freya Gerz**, 'Loving Attention and Moral Vision: Revisiting Iris Murdoch through Anscombian Grammar'

ABSTRACTS:

Nat Dyer, 'Mary Midgley amongst the Economists'

Mary Midgley had an unfashionable - for her time - view of the role of philosophy as the field whose job it was to map the relationships between different areas of knowledge. In her own life - and her writing on evolutionary theories - she grappled with what she saw as fantastical and overly-simple economic theories such as Marxism and Thatcherism. However, Midgley never engaged in an extended critique of economists or their methods. Despite this, author Nat Dyer argues that her work contains numerous insights and approaches which can provide a fruitful and profound critique of recent economic orthodoxy.

Drawing on his 2024 book, *Ricardo's Dream*, Nat maps out the various ways in which Midgley's work - especially her writing on reductionism and scientism - illuminates economics. For example: 1) her insistence on the role of imaginative world pictures in the construction of apparently objective, quantified models and theories such as the so-called 'rational' *homo economicus*; 2) her insights into the trouble we can fall in when 'experts' toggle between the technical and common meanings of words, especially emotive terms such as 'rational' and 'efficient'; 3) the failure of mainstream economics, which views the natural world as an 'externality', to grasp the importance of a holistic, ecological approach.

The talk also aims to light up some of Midgley's thinking from a new angle. It puts Midgley in conversation with the British statistician George Box and suggests an overlap in the way that Box thought of quantified models and Midgley thought of myths (ie. that 'all models/myths are wrong but some are useful'.) And, how the Greek myth of the sculptor Pygmalion - who fell in love with his own statue - is a useful analogy for experts who fall in love with their own artificial model of the world and ignore the complexity of the real world.

Dominic Lash: 'Intention in Film after Anscombe'

In the philosophical study of film the dominant view is that intentions are essentially mental states or events; Paisley Livingstone is representative when he describes an intention as "a mental attitude that represents the state of affairs the behavior is meant to realize" (Livingstone 1996: 150). Despite its influence on the work of some important philosophers who have turned their attention to film (chiefly Stanley Cavell, Robert B. Pippin, and James Conant), G.E.M. Anscombe's view that intention is, instead, best thought of as a form of description has not, generally, been given much of a hearing; her

work is not so much rejected as it is ignored. This paper aims to make a start at rectifying this situation. It will concentrate on understanding the actions of the characters we see onscreen, although it will touch on other crucial aspects of intention in film (chiefly the intentions of filmmakers). After outlining the dominant view it will sketch a positive case for an avowedly Anscombean approach to intention in film, using Preston Sturges's *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) as a case study. This approach involves a thoroughgoing rejection of the idea that it is possibly cleanly to separate the description of a film from its interpretation, as well as the suggestion that film is as rich a field as literature for the investigation of those phenomena – such as "admiration, curiosity, spite, friendship, fear, love of truth, despair" – that Anscombe herself declared to be "extremely complicated" (Anscombe 2000: 21), and for the proper understanding of which a clear grasp of intention is a prerequisite.

Molly Bellamy: 'The Divine in Iris Murdoch's Novels'

The talk will be an exploration of the Divine in Iris Murdoch's novels, as an element that characterises her literary work in ways that are both mystifying and illuminating. It will ask three questions: To what extent does the element of the divine provide a vector through which to unravel the ideal of rational man as the neutral subject of western philosophy, that 'off spring of the age of science' as she calls it, who is 'confidently rational but increasingly aware of his alienation'; that 'hero at the centre of every novel' whom she satirises in her own novels as irrational, irreverent and immoral. Does the divine foreground a political imaginary through which to undo the patriarchal philosophical logos of her age - after the feminisms? And, to what extent is Murdoch evincing a philosophy of transcendence through an ethics of the Good (unselfing) - after Plato? Or is she, like Socrates, presenting a metaphor for the soul - wherein art (*secret secret secret*) and love (*a young boy on the way to the Sun*) give passage to the intelligible world? How does the divine engage and presage the political, the philosophical and the aesthetical in Iris Murdoch's novels? The talk will last about 40 minutes, to flesh out the three questions with examples from Iris Murdoch's novels as a springboard for discussion around her recourse to the Divine.

Freya Gerz: 'Loving Attention and Moral Vision: Revisiting Iris Murdoch through Anscombian Grammar'

This paper arises from an ongoing engagement with Iris Murdoch's account of moral vision and the ethical weight of how we see others. In her *Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch reorients moral philosophy away from choice and toward attention—framing vision not merely as metaphor, but as a moral discipline. At the center of this vision is the "loving gaze": a just and sustained mode of seeing that resists the distortions of ego and seeks to apprehend the reality of others without appropriation or sentimentality—a form of

perception shaped by discipline, humility, and a refusal to instrumentalize the other. Rather than grounding moral responsiveness in empathy—as either affective resonance or cognitive perspective-taking—this project asks what becomes possible when we treat *attention* as the primary site of ethical effort. Here, Murdoch’s philosophical project finds an important affinity with G.E.M. Anscombe, not only in her resistance to utilitarian psychology and her appeal to conceptual grammar, but especially in her insistence that ethical language reflects forms of life and attention. The paper situates Murdoch’s moral aesthetics within the wider intellectual environment of the Wartime Quartet, drawing on conceptual tools developed by Anscombe to clarify the grammar of moral vision. In doing so, it asks whether Murdoch’s “loving gaze” might offer not a theory of moral feeling, but a grammar of moral *attention*—a way of speaking, seeing, and living that resists both ethical abstraction and psychological reduction, and reclaims moral vision as a site of philosophical rigor and existential responsibility