

Design a Postcard on the theme of Moral Vision

This year marks the centenary of the birth of the philosopher Iris Murdoch. Murdoch was born in Blessington Street in Dublin in 1919. We are delighted that you are joining our worldwide commemoration of her birth and helping us to celebrate her remarkable achievements as a writer and philosopher.

The posters explain how Philosophy by Postcard works. Now it is up to you to design your own postcard. But first, learn a little about Iris Murdoch's philosophy....

Iris Murdoch's Philosophy

The design on your postcard could be inspired by an idea from Iris Murdoch's philosophy on 'moral vision'.

What is 'moral vision'?

Iris Murdoch suggests that art can play a role in our ethical lives and can help us to see the nature of goodness.

She thinks that a **good** person will **look carefully, justly and lovingly** at people and things they encounter in their lives and will not let prejudice or fantasy obscure their **vision**. She thinks that encounters with **natural beauty** can help uncloud our vision of others and the world.

Murdoch also thinks that we can use our **imagination** to help us to see reality more clearly and that **art** has a special role to play in helping us see and make sense of the world around us. She also thinks that appreciating art with others has a special role to play in helping us learn about the world, and see it, from the perspective of someone who is different from us.

Art and morality are, with certain provisos...one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.

(Iris Murdoch, The Sublime and the Good)

Some questions you might consider

- Can art (novels, paintings, films, sculpture) help make someone a better person?
- If we read about a good or a courageous character in a book, does it help us to appreciate people who are good and courageous in real life?
- Does art help us to experience things beyond ourselves?
- Does art help us to experience things we may not have experienced but that have occurred in the lives of other people?
- Can art help us to understand another person's ethical view?
- Do the same abilities that we require to appreciate art help us to appreciate other people?

Here is the postcard designed by Amelia O'Donnell, winner of the Irish Young Philosophers Award. Amelia is 11 years old and is in fifth (5th) class in Scoil Phádraic Cailíní in Donabate.



Amelia says:

'I drew the average person, as Plato said stuck in a cave with a fire casting shadows on the wall the shadow of the outside world. However, as we know shadows are often not a reality. These eyes can be opened up, to see the light. And if anyone would just wear the glasses that Iris Murdoch so carefully manufactured in her books then perhaps they may have her clear moral vision of what is truly good in our world.'

You can find more inspiration by looking at all the postcards our artists have designed: www.philosophypostcard.com/artists/

For more information on Iris Murdoch and her philosophy, please see: www.philosophypostcard.com/about-iris/

Write a Postcard to a Philosopher

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What is philosophy for?

Philosophy sometimes seems to be utterly separate from everyday concerns. Is Time Real? Why is there something rather than nothing? Do we have free will? These questions seem to have little connection with our everyday lives. But Iris Murdoch thought that philosophy was a central activity in human life - as central as cooking, making art, and playing games. The task of philosophy, she thought, was to look closely and carefully at human life and to think about what is important or trivial, serious or silly.

Learning to look and to see what is really there is a difficult and never-ending task. Murdoch thinks that our 'fat relentless ego' will often stop us from seeing things as they are; instead we see them as we want them to be. We are especially likely to create fantasies when we are afraid or isolated. Art and nature can help us to get better at this kind of looking. And philosophy and literature can both be ways to describe what we see.

'Always ask a philosopher what they are afraid of'

Iris Murdoch

Find out about our postcard-writing philosophers and why Iris Murdoch matters to them: www.philosophybypostcard.com/philosophers/our-philosophers/

For more information on Iris Murdoch and her philosophy, please see. <https://www.philosophybypostcard.com/about-iris/>

What to put on a postcard to a philosopher

Think about what parts of your life you would like a philosopher to write to you about. What puzzles you or interests you. Some questions you might consider to get your ideas flowing:

What or whom do you love?
This might be people, but also animals, places, artworks, objects or activities.

What or who is important in your life?

What could you easily give up?

How do you feel when you are giving your full attention to that person or thing?

What do you know or understand now that you didn't know or understand when you were younger?

Is the idea that there is something beyond human experience important in your life?

This could be a belief in God, or something else that takes you beyond the everyday – Goodness, Truth, Beauty, Love or Art.

What did you understand when you were younger that you now find confusing or puzzling?

Are there areas of human life that are difficult to talk about?

Are there areas where our language doesn't seem adequate to the task?