But I believe that this view of rational agency is profoundly misguided – or at least unattractive. It leaves no room for *the agent* in leading her life a rational agent. Where are *you* in the conduct of your life as a rational agent? Your role with respect to reasons is to recognize them and then to respond to them by doing what you have most reason to do. There is, as it were, a rational script to follow, and your job as a rational agent is to execute that script as best you can. The orthodox view treats us as *passive* automata in relation to our reasons; indeed, with a large enough database of reasons and appropriate responses from which to learn, AI might well count as rational agents on the orthodox view… If rationality is a skill, then there is a sense in which we are slaves to our reasons. Reasons are given to us by the world, and what we must do in the face of them is given to us by normative principles or values that we discover but do not create.

(Ruth Chang, ‘Do We Have Normative Powers?’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 94, pp. 275–300, pp. 297–8).

On the passive view, everything we do as an intentional exercise of rational agency is guided by reasons. On the active view, some intentional exercises of rational agency are things we do as a matter of will, and are not themselves guided by reasons. It is this freedom to have an active role in determining the reasons we have that is the hallmark of rational agency that underwrites robust normative powers.

(Chang, ‘Do We Have Normative Powers?’, p. 298)

[For the Ancients] being endowed with free will consists in oscillating between good and evil, between ignorance and knowledge, [so] free will is a last-resort, a stop-gap… The real sage, who would be a god in the end, could do without free will and would be superior to those possessing it. When we move from Antiquity to Modernity, we follow the real invention of the idea of freedom, free will becoming a sort of creation, and this creation being, as a creation, what makes of man a god, which is an idea absolutely opposed to the ancient idea.

(Henri Bergson, *L’Évolution du problème de la liberté* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2017), p. 72; cited and translated Mark Sinclair, *Being Inclined: Félix Ravaisson’s Philosophy of Habit* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), p. 142)

The centre of this type of post-Kantian moral philosophy is the notion of the will as the creator of value. Values which were previously in some sense inscribed in the heavens and guaranteed by God collapse into the human will. There is no transcendent reality. The idea of the good remains indefinable and empty so that human choice may fill it. The sovereign moral concept is freedom, or possibly courage in a sense which identifies it with freedom, will, power. This concept inhabits a quite separate top level of human activity since it is the guarantor of the secondary values created by choice. Act, choice, decision, responsibility, independence are emphasised in this philosophy of puritanical origin and apparent austerity. It must be said in its favour that this image of human nature has been the inspiration of political liberalism. However, as Hume once wisely observed, good political philosophy is not necessarily good moral philosophy.

(Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 366)

Freedom is not choosing; that is merely the move that we make when all is already lost. Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves. Virtue is in this sense to be construed as knowledge, and connects us so with reality.

(Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 284)

I should like to use the word [imagination] (in a sense more like its normal one) to describe something which we all do a great deal of the time. This activity, which may be characterised by a contrast with ‘strict’ or ‘scientific’ thinking, is (like so many totally familiar things) not easy to describe, but one might attempt a description as follows: a type of reflection on people, events, etc., which builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities in ways which go beyond what could be said to be strictly factual. When this activity is thought to be bad it is sometimes called ‘fantasy’ or ‘wishful thinking’. That we are all constantly engaged in this activity is something which Hampshire chooses to ignore, and he selects his vocabulary accordingly.

(Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 198)

He [Hampshire] can readily admit imaginings which are unwilled, isolated, passive. But if we admit active imagination as an important faculty it is difficult not to see this as an exercise of will. Imagining is doing, it is a sort of personal exploring.

(Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 199)

The formulation of beliefs about other people often proceeds and must proceed imaginatively and under a direct pressure of will. We have to *attend* to people, we may have to have *faith* in them, and here justice and realism may demand the inhibition of certain pictures, the promotion of others.

(Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 199)

I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort. There is of course ‘distorted vision’, and the word ‘reality’ here inevitably appears as a normative word… One is often compelled almost automatically by what one *can* see. If we ignore the prior work of attention and notice only the emptiness of the moment of choice we are likely to identify freedom with the outward movement since there is nothing else to identify it with. But if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial.

(Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 329, my underlining emphases)

Some tried to thwart this objection [that the intellect is determined] by arguing that the will exercises control over the process of practical deliberation, rendering the activity of the intellect free, albeit in a derivative sense. However, critics argued that this view falls prey to an equally vicious infinite regress, since the intellectualists claimed that each act of will in turn required a judgment of the intellect to move it.

(Michael J. Murray, ‘Spontaneity and Freedom in Leibniz’, in Donald Rutherford and J. A. Cover (eds), *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 194–214, p. 202)

If some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer.

(T. H. Huxley, *Method and Results: Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), pp. 192–3; cited Justin Broackes in his ‘Introduction’ to Justin Broackes (ed.), *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher* (Oxford: OUP, 2012) pp. 1–92, p. 55)