This doctoral dissertation consists of eight articles and a summary. The subject of the study is the ethical theory of the British philosopher Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). The articles highlight two interrelated lines of significance in Murdoch’s thought. First, the study focuses on Murdoch’s approach to questions concerning the way in which philosophy pictures the relation between the “self” and the world. The main question is in which ways the individual person and the character of human experience is described and pictured in modern moral philosophy and what are the consequences of these different pictures to the lives and experiences of individual persons. The second line of Murdoch’s thought the study follows is the criticism she directs towards modern moral philosophy and especially towards noncognitivist ethics. Murdoch's position as a predecessor of new moral realism as well as her role in development of contemporary moral theory is emphasised. Murdoch's criticism of noncognitivism and her cognitivist moral realism is construed as having an ideological basis which is connected with the problem concerning the relation between the “self” and the surrounding world and that goes back to nineteenth century Millian liberalism. Murdoch's idea of the relation between language and the world as well as her view of the relation between the “self” and the world is explained in terms of Platonistic metaphysics. Her metaphysical moral theory is seen as a platonistic-pramatistic theory, where the idea of the platonistic Good as a primary moral concept connects with liberal-political goals: the aim is to create, on a basis of a new picture of human reality, new naturalistic ethics. On a personal level naturalistic ethics could offer a solid foundation to private moral reflection and on the public level it could function as a ground for social and political ethical theory.

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