We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy.

Iris Murdoch in "Against DRYNESS"

A. Contemporary Philosophical Context

Of all the present-day novelists Iris Murdoch remains unequalled in brilliance, ingenuity and a highly speculative mind. As a writer with a wide-ranging output, she has produced twenty two novels, numerous articles of philosophical, political and literary interest, a few plays and poems all of which display the authority of her incisive mind as well as a penetrating insight into human nature, particularly in the sphere of morals.

This erstwhile Oxford don has consistently pursued her dual career of a philosopher and a novelist with remarkable
success. She appears never to have felt the need to relinquish one concern for the independent pursuit of the other. But she has often denied the direct influence of philosophy on her novels. To all intents and purposes, her aim, as she conceives of it, has been to keep academic philosophic concerns from interfering with her novel writing. "I have definite philosophical views, but I don't want to promote them in my novels.... I don't want philosophy, as such, to intrude into the novel world at all.... I mention philosophy sometimes in the novels because I happen to know about it, just as another writer might talk about coal mining."¹ It is true that she does not intentionally promote philosophical ideas in her fiction in the sense that Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir do. As a philosopher novelist she claims more closeness to Dostoevsky than these two. She would prefer to be considered a highly reflective novelist like him. However, there is no denying the fact that her philosophical interests have enriched her mind, particularly her deliberations on what morality is and what goes into decision-making.² The unmistakable stamp of philosophy, in this respect, cannot be overlooked by anyone with a discerning eye. In fact, considering the moral views she holds and since it is customary of fiction to observe moral conduct in social contexts, her choice of the novel form is by no means, accidental. Fiction in this way provides the testing ground for her philosophical ideas.

Her leading philosophical concerns do not share the
attributes of contemporary philosophy. Many of her views are worked out through her persuasive polemical attacks on the current trends. She deplores the void created by the divorce of ethical values from the sphere of knowledge. The two current schools of philosophy namely Linguistic Analysis and Existentialism have, in her opinion, not only led to the lack of moral referents but also to the formation of an image of man as a "brave naked will" surrounded by an easily comprehensible empirical world. She has misgivings about this deceptively superficial concept of man, the freedom he enjoys and the "stripped empty scene" to which he has to relate. Her own philosophical position emerges out of the objections she raises against this facile picture. According to her the present one dimensional, oversimplified and dehydrated conception of the human person is compounded of a "materialistic behaviourism with a dramatic view of the individual as a solitary will." Materialistic behaviourism is the doctrine that identifies man's inner life through public concepts constructed on the basis of overt behaviour. The prevalent behaviouristic attitude of considering man is an outcome of a long tradition of empirical thought, whose most famous philosopher was David Hume. By applying the method of natural science to human nature, he argued that the contents of the mind are supplied by the senses and experience. His empirical views were the mainspring of the modern analytic
movement, under whose general rubric, both logical positivism and linguistic analysis are subsumed.

Through logical positivism, spearheaded by Bertrand Russell, the scientific method was further aided by logic and mathematics. Reality was conceived as a quantity of material atoms. The task of philosophy now shifted from the production of complicated pictures of the world to clear thinking. A revolt was launched against the metaphysical language of the British Idealists such as T.H. Green, F.H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet. However, Russell did not vote for the ordinary natural language as a vehicle of truth. This work was left to the Ordinary Language Analysis or Oxford Philosophy whose chief exponents were G.E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein. G.E. Moore introduced an unbelievably precise, analytic method for the examination of the meaning of the assertions made by other philosophers. His well-known distinction between what things are 'good' and what 'good' means, transformed the whole perspective of moral philosophy. With Wittgenstein, the attention of philosophy was directed still further to the mechanism of linguistic use. As he puts it metaphorically, he wanted to "show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" i.e. to bring words back from their metaphysical reference to their everyday use. He showed how man's entire world is constituted of linguistic experience and treated language as a social fact having as many functions as its contexts.
From this view to materialistic behaviourism, the distance was covered by Gilbert Ryle, one of the recent Ordinary Language philosophers. In his book The Concept of Mind he emphasized the structural dependence of mental concepts on public language in which they are framed. Repudiating the 'Official' or the 'Cartesian' theory of the mind, he affirmed that the working of a person's mind does not refer to a "second set of shadowy operations" but is a single career. Therefore, assertions about mental life are judged not by inner private events but by what happens publicly. Mental life is reduced to observable public performance. This has led to the negligence of the complex workings of man's mind and an impoverished concept of moral life based only on external acts and choices.

With this behaviouristic attribute of the modern man is combined the dramatic view of the individual as a free, solitary and rational will. The idea of a free rational will can be traced to Immanuel Kant who upheld the powers of human reason. He equated virtue with reason or the rational will and freedom. His philosophy, however, rested on a belief in God and immortality. These metaphysical concepts were eliminated by later philosophers. This resulted in a demured picture of a solitary individual, left to shoulder the responsibility of searching for all potential meaning and value within himself. For the utilitarians like Bentham and
James Stuart Mill this individual and his happiness became the paramount concern. The moral self-development of the individual is the ultimate value in Mill's ethics.

Since Murdoch regards philosophy as the mirror and guide of the age, the preceding survey of the Anglo-Saxon philosophical developments was broadly aimed at showing how the present "shallow and flimsy" idea of human personality has come into being. She describes the representative of linguistic analysis as an "Ordinary Language Man". A better description of this man cannot be given than the one by Stuart Hampshire in his book Thought and Action. It has been cogently summed up by Murdoch in these words:

He is rational and totally free except in so far as, in the most ordinary law court and commonsensical sense, his degree of self-awareness may vary. He is, morally speaking, monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him. His moral language is a practical pointer, the instrument of his choices, the indication of his preferences. His inner life is resolved into his acts and choices, and his beliefs, which are also acts, since a belief can only be identified through its expression. His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decisions. The only moral word which he requires is 'good' (or 'right'), the word which expresses decisions. His rationality expresses itself in awareness of the facts, whether about the world or about himself. The virtue which is fundamental to him is sincerity. 9

The "Ordinary Language Man" described above is conventional, behaviouristic and liberal. Since the basic inspiration of the empiricists was science, it led to the
extreme desire for precision of meaning and logic. For clarification they had to appeal to the conception of ordinary language. As he is surrounded by conventional rules of ordinary language his personality represents a surrender to convention. It is a behaviouristic image of man whose inner states are revealed only through his overt, publicly observable acts. His words, his experiences are confined to the verification of senses and what is describable in words. He is totally free, alone and responsible for his actions.

The "Totalitarian Man", as described by Murdoch, is the representative of the existentialist philosophy, particularly that of the French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre. Her first published work, *Sartre : Romantic Rationalist* (1953), is a critical study of his philosophical, literary and political ideas. Murdoch's own philosophical stance is an outcome of the refutation of some aspects of his ideology. Therefore, a brief recapitulation of Sartrean existentialism is necessary to make the Murdochian picture of man and his freedom clear.

Existentialism, as opposed to the insular and academic analytic philosophy, was directed towards the reaffirmation of the free individual and his authentic concerns. Sartre's philosophy is humanistic because it is concerned with human freedom and consciousness. He accepts Nietzsche's announcement that "God is dead" as the signal event which defined man as absolutely free and responsible for his destiny.
Man, in this situation, has to choose for himself and is the creator of his own scale of values. His acts of choice are a matter of great anguish and responsibility because he can invoke neither any supernatural force nor any Kantian moral law to guide him. His nature is a bare potentiality and does not possess a definite shape. He merely exists and then defines his essential self. The essence of his being lies not in the structures of the past but in his freedom to make choices for the future.

Sartre's concept of freedom has to be understood in the context of his analysis of consciousness which is the focal point of his philosophy. Consciousness is described as a "flickering unstable, semitransparent, moment-to-moment being" moving from a state of open self-awareness to a more opaque thing-like condition. He compares it to a gluey paste-like substance which may solidify or remain liquid. Solidification is a kind of conscious refusal to reflect. This is a state of self-deception, insincerity or bad faith (mauvaise foi). The human tendency towards bad faith is reflected in man's perverse efforts to deny his own responsibility and to flee from the stark reality of his inescapable freedom. Freedom signifies the capacity for imaginative reflection rather than an emotional, muddy immersion in the world. The conscious being seeks to free himself from bad faith and aspires towards a condition of
coincidence of himself with himself. He desires a self-identity or a completeness or form which he lacks. His condition is comparable to the "broken disc of the moon" which lacks what is necessary to complete it and transform it into a full moon. However, this striving for completeness in man is a futile passion and is foredoomed.

Sartre's individual is essentially solitary. His idea of interpersonal relationships is a kind of a subjective version of the "master and slave" situation in Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sartrean concept of love follows Hegel's notion that love leads ultimately to the enslavement of one consciousness by another. Reciprocal love in Sartre's view is dangerous, if not impossible, because it easily moves towards the satisfactions of sadism or masochism. It fails to bring people closer. Instead, it enhances their alienation. A lover is constantly hounded by the thought of his beloved's attitude towards him and this is a perpetual source of anguish. Sartre's account of love is a logical development of his concept of being-in-itself and its relationship with being-for-itself. The lover as a free being-for-itself does not want to possess the other as an object but as a pour-soi (being-for-itself). He wants to possess the liberty of the other. Conflict characterizes this type of relationship because a free and conscious being cannot be possessed. The appropriation of the other is desired but total enslavement only kills the
love. If the beloved is to be transformed into an automaton
the lover feels himself alone. He does not demand this type
of possession. "He wants to possess freedom as freedom."13
This struggle is in itself contradictory and self-defeating.
It results in diminished contact with others, generates
hostility and increases the loneliness of the individual.
Murdoch describes this concept of love as unrealistic and
compares it with a "battle between two hypnotists in a closed
room."14

For a vivid picture of the "Totalitarian Man", we
must again attend to Murdoch's description of him in her
essay, "Against Dryness":

The individual is pictured as solitary and
totally free. There is no transcendent reality,
there are no degrees of freedom. On the one hand
there is a mass of psychological desires and
social habits and prejudices, and on the other
hand there is the will. Certain dramas, more
Hegelian in character, are of course enacted
within the soul; but the isolation of the will
remains....the ordinary traditional picture of
personality and the virtues lies under suspicion
of mavnais ted. Again the only real virtue is
sincerity. 15

The "Totalitarian Man" is a solitary moral agent,
absolutely free and self-enclosed to the extent of 'neurosis'.
He is very much like the Kantian Man-god, beautifully
portrayed in his Grundlegung, who, when confronted with even
Christ, turns away to consider the judgement of his own
reason and conscience. The best example of this man is
Milton's Lucifer. The emphasis on choice, will and unillusioned exercise of complete freedom characterise his moral life. All values have collapsed into his omnipotent will. The highest quality to be prized in this state is that of sincerity. To do so he must see through social and emotional shams and pay direct scrupulous attention to presenting himself as he sees himself. That is all he can do to avoid living in bad faith. His chief desire is to seek 'form' and clarity for his life. There is no transcendent reality above him, no "steady pattern of divine, nor the reliable constellations of Newtonian physics." There are other people in this world, not real or separate, but only extensions of the consciousness of the subject whose endeavour is to sum them up and give them a pattern or form of his own desire. He looks at others as menaces and objects to be manipulated rather than loved. This excessive self-preoccupation hinders him from establishing contact with other human beings.

Sartre deserves our gratitude for having defined the scope and psychological manifestations of human freedom as well as for his ruthlessly honest portrayal of the failure of sympathy amongst human beings. But by refusing to regard human confrontations as encounters between conscious co-ordinates, the Sartrean self retains only an undignified identity. He is stripped of other-regarding impulses which
make him forfeit his potential as a moral agent and restrains his integration with society. On this issue, Murdoch parts company with him.

Existentialism, though more concrete than linguistic empiricism, is broadly speaking an unrealistic, over-optimistic doctrine and a purveyor of false values. It has painted a picture of ourselves that is too grand. We have isolated and identified ourselves with an unrealistic conception of will, thus losing the vision of a reality, separate from ourselves.

We face a stripped empty scene with an isolated will leaping about unrestrained. Exercising this freedom is a lonely individual surrounded by a sea of scientific facts. As Murdoch puts it, on the one hand we have this "Luciferian philosophy of adventures of the will, and on the other natural science." The major philosophical movements briefly surveyed above do not furnish an adequate concept of man and his freedom. The two "depositaries of wisdom" fail to provide a sufficiently convincing and fruitful theory of personality. The general flaw underlying the two philosophies is the increased tendency towards solipsism. Existentialism reduces man to neurosis and linguistic empiricism to a series of empty conventions, which is but another kind of solipsism. Both of them attack traditional metaphysics and do not believe in any structure larger than themselves. "Neither
provides us with a standpoint for considering real human beings in their variety, and neither presents us with any technique for exploring and controlling our own spiritual energy."20 Virtue is considered in terms of will, not knowledge. It is not concerned with anything real outside. The emphasis is on reasoned choices and not moral vision. These modern thinkers have dismantled the old substantial picture of the self and in its place enthroned a "denuded self whose only virtues are freedom, or at best sincerity, or, in the case of the British philosophers, an everyday reasonableness."21 Man has learnt to think himself as free but at the cost of surrendering the background.

Murdock believes that the way out of this dilemma is to recognize that "concepts as well as men should enjoy the privileges of transformation."22 The pressing need is, therefore, to "return from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth" and to transform the present image of man by introducing a more satisfactory liberal theory of personality. The nucleus of her theory rests on faith in the free, separate and irreducible individual who is related to a rich, complicated background from which as a moral being he has a lot to learn. Her concept of freedom is posited against a dense, transcendent and intractable backdrop of reality. "We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy."
B. Murdochian Concept of Freedom

(i) Moral Vision: The Middle Way

As we turn to the Murdochian Man after viewing the "Ordinary Language Man" and the "Totalitarian Man", we discover that he represents the middle way postulated by her as an alternative. Some of her ideas reveal a measure of agreement with what she has learnt from the two contemporary philosophies, but to a great extent she endeavours to improve upon their inherent flaws mentioned earlier. With this curious blend of ideas, she has presented a sufficiently complex image of man, accompanied by a more convincing and less absolute concept of freedom.

Like Sartre and the orthodox Christianity (she is a non-believer herself) she respects the sanctity of the individual and believes that he is precious and unique. But her description of man's estate in this world strikes a note of existential despair. She defines him as an accidental creature briefly adrift in a contingent universe:

Human life has no external point....we are what we seem to be, transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance....we are simply here. And if there is any kind of sense or unity in human life, and the dream of this does not cease to haunt us, it is of some other kind and must be sought within a human experience which has nothing outside it.34

In a universe bereft of any divine providence where everything is radically singular and atomistic, the finite standpoint of
the individual is the only valid one. He cannot look for help beyond himself. He is his own testing ground and within him lies the potential to work out freely his own salvation.

He is the centre but not the solipsistic centre of the universe because Murdoch sees him uniquely placed, not in isolation but in the midst of other human beings. In order to stave off the cold hand of Sartrean solipsistic individualism, she has come closer to Marcel and Jaspers. Sartre's theory of mutuality with its emphasis on social interaction must have particularly appealed to her. She visualises a more objective view of the universe and eyes the Cartesian 'Cogito' with suspicion because Descartes' assertion _Cogito ergo sum_ (I think therefore I am) leads to a greater concentration on self-consciousness. She accepts man as she finds him in a social context. She does not station him as alone, self-involved and indifferent to the heaving, undulating world around him. He is not unintegrated with society like the existentialist hero, whose rational awareness appears to be in inverse ratio to social integration. Like Gabriel Marcel, she criticises Sartre's intolerance of the world's contingency. Unlike Sartre, she experiences no feeling of nausea for the contingent world around. In fact, it is Sartre's lack of interest in the contingent reality of persons and objects which drew her away from his philosophy.
Murdoch insists that man is basically a social entity and it is through interaction with others that the soundness of his moral principles can be tested. Being a moral agent, it is inconceivable that he should be alone in his private world. He has to be aware of the reality of other people while taking moral decisions and making choices.

In one of her philosophical articles, Murdoch points out that the different conceptions of freedom go with the two views of morality i.e., liberal and naturalist. The liberal (existentialist or empirical) stresses the discontinuity between the choosing agent and the world which surrounds him. He is depicted as standing out from the background of nature and society. He considers himself the source of all values and displays them in his choices and acts. The emphasis is on choice and absolute freedom. The naturalist (the Marxists, Hegelians, Christians), on the other hand, believes that as moral beings we are immersed in a transcendent reality. According to this view, moral progress lies in the awareness of this reality and submission to it. Murdoch's definition of freedom appears to be closer to the naturalist way of conceiving morality.

In the Murdochian sense, moral freedom is not centred around choice nor is it an exercise of the solitary omnipotent will involved in an empty self-assertion. It cannot, also be considered as a romantic gesture of rebelling
against the world by burrowing into the self. It is not a
self-centred freedom — rather it is other-centred and
involves the task of "knowing and understanding and respecting"
things quite other than ourselves." He who perceives what
is real and respects the 'otherness' of reality will also act
rightly. If the magnetic field is right, our movements within
it will tend to be right. There is a wider and deeper
meaning attached to her concept of freedom than is normally
associated with it. She writes:

Freedom is, I think, a mixed concept. The true
half of it is simply a name of an aspect of virtue
concerned especially with the clarification of
vision and the domination of selfish impulse. The
false and more popular half is a name for the
self-assertive movements of deluded selfish will
which because of our ignorance we take to be
something autonomous. 27

Freedom associated with the clarification of vision
is not a "grandiose leaping" of the will in moments of
choice. The existentialists identify freedom with the outward
movement of choices and acts. What happens in between is
considered insignificant. They ignore the personality of the
moral agent and the power of his secret, fragmentary, opaque
and obsessive inner life. In their opinion the inner life is
almost absent or blurred. Only public reasons and publicly
observable conduct matters. A moral concept to them is like
a movable tag that can be affixed to any particular area of
fact.
Freedom, in Murdoch's view, is closely concerned with the neglected and unexplored area which constitutes the inner background to much of the decision-making and choice. This background consists of personal attitudes, vision and the conceptions we form of ourselves and of others with whom we come into contact. It pertains to "a type of reflection on people, events etc., which builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities in ways which go beyond what could be strictly factual." Moral choice is, thus, a mysterious matter influenced by this continuous mental background having a life of its own. The visible acts of will and choices are dependent on the condition of the system in between the moments of overt choices. In this respect, we differ not only because we make different choices or because we select different objects out of the same world, but because we 'see' different worlds. The current view conceives of moral differences as differences of choice in a 'given' background. But Iris Murdoch claims that the differences are of total 'vision'. The metaphor of 'vision' suitably describes her concept of morals and freedom.

In this light, freedom is connected with the acquiring of an "accurate vision", to enable men to look at things and persons objectively in their opaque, irreducible, particular individualities. The effort required for this purpose involves a moral discipline and the suppression of the self. This ideal of self-effacement is, of course, a
traditional prescription of all religious mystics who believe that the self must be negated for enlightenment. Iris Murdoch, however, is not advising an adherence to any traditional prescriptive code. Her interpretation implies an acceptance of the contingent reality by the disciplined overcoming of self.

The main obstacle to clear-sightedness is the self or the enormous 'relentless ego' with its self-regarding, avaricious tentacles spread far and wide. Modern psychology, particularly Freud, has a lot to tell about this characteristic of selfishness. He has a pessimistic view of human nature. He describes the psyche as:

an ego-centric system of quasi mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control.... Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings. 30

The psyche is historically determined and constantly defends itself. In some ways it is like a machine. It needs sources of energy to operate and it is predisposed to fixed patterns of activity. Its freedom of choice is minimal. One of its main pastimes is daydreaming. Its reluctance to face unpleasant realities is visible in the capacious illusions it creates in order to veil the world. Its consciousness is not like a transparent glass through which it can view the world. It is more or less a haze of fantastic reverie designed to
protect itself from pain. This anxiety-ridden creature, busy in his daydreams, is constantly fabricating a defensive armour around himself. His self-protective shield, Sartrean in nature, keeps off the blows and prevents him from direct contact with reality. He is almost a victim of neurosis. In "The Sublime and the Good", Iris Murdoch mentions 'convention' and 'neurosis' as the two factors which do not allow us to see outside ourselves. She explains:

One may fail to see the individual... because we are ourselves sunk in a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions, or because we see each other exclusively as so determined. Or we may fail to see the individual because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own. 31

Fantasy described as "bad imagining" 32 by Murdoch is the chief enemy of morals, art and freedom. It is constantly engaged in the activity of reducing the formless and contingent reality into a false unity by imposing a form on it. The hallmarks of fantasy are the tendency to see people as possessing fixed qualities and to think of life in terms of pattern or necessity. In Plato's system fantasy or sikania 33 is the state of most irrational kind of awareness. It is image-ridden and full of illusions. This is the condition of the prisoners in the Platonic Cave myth, who face the wall and can only see the shadows cast by the fire (self). Sikania is comparable to what Sartre describes as a
Freedom, in the Murdochian sense, is the overcoming of this fault of consciousness. It is freedom from fantasy. In order to respect others and see the world as it is, man has to extricate himself out of the patterns of 'bad imagining' and open the way to constructive imagination. Iris Murdoch knows that this illusion ridden egocentricity, though harmful, is deeply ingrained in the human mechanism. It can only be counteracted in a slow and difficult process of 'unselfing'. She insists that overcoming "egoism in its protean forms of fantasy and illusion is automatically to become more moral."34 An attachment to something outside the fantasy mechanism is required to liberate this self-enclosed system. Earlier the religious devices of prayer and other sacraments were helpful in purifying, reinvigorating the self and in inspiring good actions. But with the present generation's refusal to believe in God and religion these useful devices have been taken away from man. Murdoch deplores the deprivation of the steadying influence of religion.35 She praises Buddhism for its emphasis on the transformation of consciousness through meditation.

She recommends various other secular, mental disciplines to bring about a change of vision and to direct the attention away from the self. Learning of mathematics, or a new language, paying attention to beauty of nature and
art are all, in her view, tasks which can provide occasions for 'unselfing'. The rigorousness of mathematics and a new language requires total concentration, humility and honesty which reduces self-involvement. Attention paid to the beauty of nature is equally capable of purging the mind of selfish cares and fantasy dreams. Taking pleasure in the sheer pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees enables a man to acquire a clarity of vision which reminds one of the Heatsian negative capability. Murdoch also suggests contemplation of works of art in order to curtail the vagaries of the will and fantasy. This immersion in art is not to be an escape route from the world. It should embolden him to face the hard and contingent reality. Her novels are full of examples of characters acquiring a fresh insight into persons and situations while looking at some work of art. Dora's experience while looking at the Gainsborough painting in *The Bell* and Paula's before the Bronzino Canvas in *The Nice and the Good* enable them to see the reality they had never attended to before. Literature, too, provides a training for a just and selfless mode of vision because it is an "education in how to picture and understand human situations."  

In morals and aesthetics this selfless contemplation, very much like a prayer, has been described as 'attention'. She has borrowed this word from Simone Weil. 'Attention', 
according to Murdoch, is descriptive of the recurrently renewed attempts to 'see' things, objects, people and moral situations truly as they are. Like Plato and Malebranche, Simone Weil considers 'attention' far more important than will. "We should be indifferent to good and evil but, when we are indifferent, that is to say when we project the light of our attention equally on both, the good gains the day. This phenomenon comes about automatically." The emphasis is on paying attention to such a point that we no longer have a choice. Murdoch endorses Simone Weil's opinion that those who 'attend' properly to life make moral decisions in terms of what they have been made by their attention. They have been continuously building structures of value and their choices will emanate from these structures.

Iris Murdoch connects 'attention' to Kant's concept of achtung (attention) which is respect for the moral law - a type of suffering pride that accompanies the recognition of duty. Actual experience of freedom is akin to Kantian achtung and existentialist angst when man realises that although swayed by passion, he is also capable of rational conduct. But the freedom which Kant implies is an "aspiration to a universal order consisting of prefabricated harmony." His concept of freedom is not the tragic freedom, upheld by Murdoch. The tragic quality of Murdochian freedom is linked with love. In her opinion:
The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. Nor is there any social totality within which we can come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled. We have only a segment of the circle. Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other, in the context of an infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding, of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness. 38

Selflessness and love are therefore central to her philosophy. These imply looking at the world and encountering the "volcanic otherness" both within and without the self not with hostility but with a "just and loving gaze". She has expressed the same idea in various phrases. It is described as a "patient and loving regard", "just and compassionate vision", "pity and justice" and the fictional equivalent for it is "tolerance". The concept of love posited by her is neither Sartrean nor Shelleyan idealized version of the self nor Whitman's insistence on the merger of personalities.

Like Plato, she is aware that Eros is the fundamental force which compels the prisoners into the light of the sun and freedom. At the same time she is conscious that it can also become a "force which finds expression in the unbridled appetites of the tyrant." She differentiates between real and the false romantic love. The first being selfless and other-directed, the second, selfish and possessive. Both
these loves figures in almost all her novels. The type of love which is romantic is the product of fantasy. It is the desire of the sturdy ego, in Platonic terms, "to dominate and possess the beloved....to derealize, devour and absorb him, subject him to the mechanism of our own fantasy."41 It is a dangerous condition being so self-centred. Both Platonic and Courtly loves are romantic because in both the cases the person who is loved is endowed with an imaginary personality. The beloved is transformed into a dream object and you are in love with your own image of her. You thus put yourself under a spell. In Platonic love, the lover feels superior and protective and in Courtly love, he feels inferior. Neither of these conditions grant equal status to the beloved.42 Nearly all her novels are full of examples where characters are forced into the "volatile domain" of romantic love. They impose forms of their own fantasy on their loved ones. But gradually through reorientation of 'attention' they are able to see the reality or have a non-violent apprehension of the other. Jake Donaghue in Under the Hat, the Barnaby in The Red and Green, Hugh in An Unofficial Rose, Edmund Marraway in The Italian Girl and Ducane in The Nice and the Good are characters who achieve a kind of impersonal love for the other.

She recognises the importance of disciplined love which opens out into the world and sees people as they are.
It harbours no intention of dominating or appropriating the other to the predatory organism of the self. It is neither a master nor a slave. Unlike Nietzsche's emancipated soul, it has no desire to arrogate to itself the liberty of others. It is a neutral, impersonal love—an extraordinary revealing force whereby the centre of importance is all of a sudden ripped out of the self. The lover respects the beloved and in Kantian terms treats her as an end and not a means. She is considered a real person, not a shadow or a substitute of his thoughts. This impersonal love is of the ideal kind to which we may aspire but can hardly ever attain.

Such a love cannot be easily achieved because of the difficulty involved in mastering the self. The possibility of its achievement lies in the total negation of the self and this can be implemented only by death or the proximity of death. The acceptance of death automatically increases our concern with what is not ourselves leading to selfless kindness and love. The theme of death for this purpose has been taken up in Bruno's Dream. But its proximity, working as a catalytic agent in a character's life figures in many of her novels like The Unicorn, The Nice and the Good, The black Prince, Henry and Cato and Runa and Soldiers.

Moral freedom, associated with clarity of vision and acquired by focussing loving attention on the reality of others cannot be aptly defined without reference to virtue or
goodness. Both Kant and Hegel considered freedom in terms of virtue. Kant's moral philosophy equated virtue with freedom and reason i.e. an ability to impose rational order. Hegel pictured virtue in terms of knowledge and freedom, but he stressed self-knowledge or self-awareness. Like Hegel, Murdoch associates virtue with freedom and knowledge. But her emphasis is on the knowledge of others and not the self.

The magnetic centre towards which love moves is virtue or the good. Murdoch considers the image of the 'Good' instead of 'God' as the "least corruptible and most realistic picture for us to use in our reflections upon moral life." In Platonic philosophy, 'Good' is represented by the image of the sun. The moral pilgrim in due process of reorientation leaves the Cave and begins to see the world in the light of the sun. The sun gives light and energy and empowers him to understand the truth. The world seen in its light exhibits true relationships. Plato traces the moral odyssey of the soul through four stages of enlightenment. It is only at the end of the journey that he reaches the "non-hypothetical first principle which is the form or the idea of the Good." Unlike Plato's version of the visible progress of the soul towards good, Iris Murdoch presents the formula that the light of the sun does exist but we cannot presume
to be able to see it clearly. We can advance towards the unimaginable good by paying attention to the route and its humble details. Concentration on the randomness and particularity of nature and man may bring about an enlightening breakthrough or a form of grace.

It has generally been assumed that good has an indefinable and mysterious quality. According to G.E. Moore and his successors, good is considered a value-tag of the choosing will. Being connected with freedom it is like an empty space which human choice and will can fill up. In his opinion, this accounts for its indefinability. To Murdoch, however, good involves the difficult task of understanding the inexhaustible, mysterious reality and therefore shares its indefinable and elusive quality.

In the Murdochian credo it is the only thing worthy of pursuit in a world bereft of God and religion. The haunting sense of mortality by reminding us that "we are creatures of a day" and that all is vanity may light up the pointlessness of being good. But goodness includes the acceptance of the idea of death, chance, contingency and transience. Attention on it has to be focussed in all humility without any desire for reward. If we are to be good, we are to be good "for nothing".

The Murdochian concept of freedom, as we have seen,
is linked with virtue, love, attention, humility and realism. It demands objectivity and a process of 'unselfing'. But this programme is difficult to execute. It is directed towards a goal which is not easily accessible. It is an endless task for it demands a leaping out of our normally predatory egos. If we take the strength of the ego into consideration, "the appearance of success is either a delusion or a sickness of will." Efforts towards this direction do not always bear fruit and often lead to failures. A just and accurate vision does not easily to anyone. Even if it does, it is shortlived and partial. The task is progressive and endlessly to be perfected with the ideal limit forever receding.

It is a struggle which is obscure and historically conditioned. Only the existentialist who has absolute faith in his rationality and breaks with the past can consider himself totally free and master of the situation. In the Murdochian sense man is not absolutely free because the work of attention determining his freedom is a continual unconscious process. We are not totally free as we cannot suddenly change ourselves according to our rational choice. We cannot overnight alter the structures of values we have constructed or what we have learnt to 'see'. This reveals the slowness of moral advancement and the incompetence of the will. The will in this kind of freedom is not an
unimpeded movement towards self-assertion, but obedience and humility. It is not an "inconsequential chucking of one's weight about, it is a disciplined overcoming of self" and a selfless respect for reality.47

Therefore we have to accept an obscure, historically conditioned, less fully conscious and less steadily rational image of man. This requires thinking of him in terms of partial and limited freedom. We have to picture him as connected to a transcendent reality which he can try to understand if he attends to it lovingly and with a vision unclouded by the form-making fantasy.

(ii) Aesthetic Vision: "House fit for free Characters"

Iris Murdoch considers modern philosophy as inadequate and finds its flaws reflected in the novel. She holds the current schools of philosophy responsible for the shallow concept of man which has led to a corresponding defeat in the liberal idea of character as a free and growing agent in the modern novel. Her criticism of the present fictional forms is in no way original. After the second world war, most novelists have been equally restive with them.

She deplores the general falling off in the fictional mode because of the excessive experimentalism and symbolism of the 20th century novels particularly with James Joyce, Conrad, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. The second
world war, however, sounded a death knell of this highly creative phase. Its experimental techniques were held suspect. The post-war period has been described as "diminished times" when according to Bergonzi, the novel was no longer novel. The belief entertained in all quarters was that either it had fled to other areas, especially the theatre or that significant changes in it were taking place not in Britain but in France, America or the Commonwealth countries. This period led to the revival of the social and liberal novel which displayed interest in character and plot rather than experimentation. These writers agreed that the experimental novel was no longer viable and that retreat was perhaps expedient. Iris Murdoch shares the same belief.

In her opinion the modern consciousness is trapped between 'convention' (the legacy of the analytic philosophy) and 'neurosis' (Existentialism). The contemporary novel has become the expression of one or the other. The fictional modes embodying these two tendencies are described as 'journalistic' and 'crystalline'. According to her, both these forms exhibit the same 'dryness' which is encountered in the concept of the human person.

The ideal of 'dryness' or in other words 'classicism' is mainly connected with T.E. Hulme, although T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards were also in its favour. It insists on smallness, clarity, precision and self-
containedness. It demands the work of art to be whole and complete with its own terms of reference. Those who practise 'dryness' try to externalize a personal conflict in a tightly conceived myth or symbol. 50

The 'crystalline' novel embodies this ideal. It is a novel of "dry aesthetic concentration", 51 more concerned with form rather than the portrayal of the complex, varied aspects of reality and experience. Murdoch describe it as "a small quasi allegorical object portraying a human condition". 52 Its chief interest lies not in characterization but in general human truths. It is related to the symbolic novel. Like it, it tends to be intolerant and anti-liberal, with no respect for the 'messy' human being and his 'messy' affairs. In fact, it was against messiness that the ideal of 'dryness' and 'cleanliness' was counterpoised by T.S. Eliot.

The 'crystalline' writers are more interested in things, artifacts rather than in persons. They search for beauty in small, compact, clean and self-contained things from which all contingency is expunged. This theory is related to Kant's concept of the beautiful. His main impulse was to turn away from contingency in order to satisfy the longing for some form that can explain away reality into a timeless, non-discursive and self-contained whole. The 'crystalline' writers do not aim at meaning. "Not to mean, but to be" is their definition of the function of a literary
work. The novel itself is almost reduced to a poem in disguise—a "tight metaphysical object, which wishes it were a poem."\(^{53}\)

W.J. Harvey, discussing the dry novel, comments that it is "neat, precise, formally watertight, which sees life as something to be beautifully bottled rather than as something to be swum in."\(^{54}\) He quotes Sartre's *La Nausée* as an example and describes it as a hard and jewel-like object, immune from the flux of existence. The existential novel is a fine example of the 'crystalline' form. It is the story of a 'totalitarian' man, lonely and brave. Albert Camus's *The Fall* or *The Stranger* fit into this category. In England, the elegant and beautiful fables of Muriel Spark e.g. *The Driver's Seat*, *The Public Image*, *The Mandelbaum Gate* and William Golding's *Pincher Martin* are good versions of this form.

The journalistic novel with its scenic dramatic method is the other popular form which Iris Murdoch refers to. It is a novel of accumulated facts and information, "a large shapeless quasi documentary object, the degenerate descendant of the nineteenth century novel, telling, with pale conventional characters some straight forward story enlivened with empirical facts."\(^{55}\) It is a highly documented novel and the motive impulse behind it, is either the prevailing institutions or historical facts. Though it possesses characters, these are crowds of people in their confusing
Highly conventional in character, it offers a Hegelian or Marxist view of man. "The individual takes his importance as a phase in a historical program, he is subordinated to and ultimately definable by the institutions that surround him...social, political or religious." 56

The 'journalistic' novel is loose, formless, conventional and topical in which characterization is not given much importance. The writers whom she appears to have in mind are Arnold Bennett, Drieser, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis, Simone de Beauvoir's The Mandarins, C.P. Snow's Strangers and Brothers, Antony Powell's The Music of Time, Angus Wilson's The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot and Don Jacobson's The Beginners are all novels that come close to the definition of 'journalistic' fiction.

In Murdoch's opinion both these alternatives are unsatisfactory. The 'crystalline' novel is too neurotic, solipsistic and deals with an isolated figure. It represents the triumph of the myth. The language is non-discursive and private. The reader is not invited to participate. He appears to be viewing the action from outside. In such a novel the characters are not free, they are under the control of the author. A single person appears to swallow up the entire book. The characters are mere instruments in the success of the symbol and do not work out as independent characters.
In fact, they are not supposed to be so otherwise they would hinder the writer from exteriorizing his personal conflict. The 'journalistic' novel, on the other hand, is a social epic, with too little control and therefore lacks a formal creative unity.

Both these forms of fiction are inadequate because they are not concerned with the creation of free, realistic and lifelike characters. However, she thinks that the novel of 'neurosis' (crystalline) pays more dividends than 'convention' as it is better written and more imaginatively conceived. The main flaw in them is that neither grapples with reality. They do not attach any significance to the real, impenetrable person in all his opacity and particularity.

Iris Murdoch defines the real crisis in modern fiction as the "flying apart of two different aims" i.e. either the production of a "closely coiled, carefully-constructed object" or the description of "the world around one in a fairly loose and cheerful way." To put it in different words, the modern novel appears to be foundering between the Scylla and Charybdis of naturalism and symbolism. The ideal proposed by her is the combination of the merits of both. Her intention is to steer a middle course between the two prevailing forms. What she desires is a combination of "real character" and a "magical pattern" i.e. characters
who are free of the authorial grip and a form that ensures
t heir free growth. These are the qualities which she admires
in Shakespeare. She asserts: "A novel must be a house fit
for free characters to live in; and to combine form with a
respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the
highest art of prose." 59

Her novelistic aim is to bring about a cure for the
ills of romanticism that have afflicted the two current modes
of fiction. The twentieth century novel, she feels, has lost
interest in the human subject and has taken refuge in myths
and symbols. Profundity of characterization is singularly
lacking in it. There is either a complete absence of it or
the characters are treated as mere clock work. This "retreat
from character" 60 is symptomatic of the larger malady, already
discussed. Her interest in bringing about a resurrection of
the novel of character normally follows her deeper concern
with the human person. As a model, she posits the nineteenth
century novel, full of old fashioned, naturalistically
conceived characters who inhabit the fiction of Tolstoy,
George Eliot and Jane Austen. Their works contain a plurality
of persons all of whom are "mutually independent centers of
significance which are those of real individuals." 61

She advocates a return to their path of realism.
The novelist of the 19th century, as Balzac describes him,
was a recorder of society. His production, to quote Stendhal,
was a "mirror in the roadway" reflecting the traffic of life. The social scene itself was a life giving framework for him. The importance of the individual was merged with his role in the society and both were equally sustaining. The novel written in such a situation naturally led to the withdrawal of the author. The result was the creation of solid and lifelike characters who were not mere puppets of the neurotic and introspective mind of their creator.

For the creation of such characters the writer has to shun the role of an omniscient narrator who takes a God's eye view of the world. In this process he can liberate himself from his egoistic impulses. In order to escape from the tendency towards solipsistic self-involvement (the hallmark of contemporary fiction) both in morals and in art, the prescription remains the same:

Overcome personal fantasy and egoistic anxiety and self-indulgent day dream. Order and separate and distinguish the world justly. Magic in its unregenerate form as the fantastic doctoring of the real for consumption by the private ego is the bane of art as it is of philosophy. . . . The artist's worst enemy is his eternal companion, the cozy dreaming ego, the dweller in the vaults of aikasia. 63

Fantasy hinders the writer from seeing the reality outside him. It encourages a false sense of the real which is consolatory in nature, for it presents reality as a given whole and endeavours to shrink it into a single pattern or a form. Both in her theoretical writings and her novels she
insists that this is wrong. The truth is that reality is incomplete, inexpressible and intransigent to any order or system. Chance, accident and contingency play a vital role in defining it. Only novels which succeed in portraying this can be considered as truly realistic.

Contingency, therefore, has to be accepted in the Murdochian concept of reality. The essential part of it is the awareness of the real impenetrable human person who is substantial, indefinable and valuable. It is important for the novelist to keep in mind the accidental, unlikely and unpredictable aspects of human nature in order to destroy fantasy and open the way for imaginative recognition of the otherness of his characters. These are the factors that help in the creation of convincing characters who are not mere stereotypes or flat. Contingency provides them with elements of mysteriousness.

The highest test of the novelist, in Murdoch's opinion, lies in the apprehension of the otherness of his characters with his own will removed from the scene. A good artist must be impersonal. He must possess the Keatsian negative capability. Bledyrd's opinion, in the context of painting, holds good for all artists: "when confronted with an object...we must of course treat it reverently... attempt to show what it is like in itself, and not treat it as a symbol of our own moods and wishes." Murdoch has used the
word 'tolerance' to describe this quality of objectivity involved in the creation of real and independent characters. It is equivalent to love or compassion in her moral theory. It enables a man and an artist to discover the individual particularities of others instead of visualising human nature as unitary. Murdoch shares this idea with John Bayley who pleads for a loving and detached soliciude in the creation of characters. 65

The creation of lifelike characters is not an easy task. The moment comes when the author discovers to his dismay that he does not have sufficient knowledge of the 'otherness' of the personages whom he has set forth to create in his fiction. Murdoch describes this as a spiritual failure or the failure of imperfect love for as the Abbess in The Bell tells Michael: "All our failures are ultimately failures in love." 66 In this sense, all works of art are perhaps failures because we are not able to love realistically enough. Knowledge of others is never completely attainable and is always subject to revision in ordinary life. The novelist who balks at tidy summing up of people as possessing fixed qualities feels frustrated when he reaches this point.

Playing the role of an invisible writer, she believes in teasing her reader into thought by displaying various layers of the reality of her characters i.e. subconscious, conscious and what can be taken as an overt
fact, She has also experimented with narrative techniques which produce agents who are not completely comprehensible even though presented through various points of view, none of which is final. For example, in the concluding portions of *The Black Prince* various versions of Bradley Pearson's character and his involvement in the murder of Arnold leave us with an inconclusive picture. We can, in this way, simultaneously empathize with him and distance ourselves for objective judgement.

Murdoch's purpose here is also to help the reader to realize this incompleteness. Like the writer, he too must strip himself of his delusions and read the novel perceptively. He must be given characters who enlighten rather than mislead him. "If a character is presented with excess of lucidity and transparency, a sense of futility may overcome the reader" and he will not be affected. She counts on him to fill up what is left blank and give it a living tissue. In this way writing of a novel is a process of collaboration of the author and reader in an act of freedom.

Another unavoidable and formidable problem for the writer is how much form he should impose on his work. In art and literature, as distinct from life, this issue takes up a new dimension. Form is a great temptation, she agrees, but the difference is that life can escape its allurement
while art cannot do without it. That is why she is not so much against it in art as in life. "It is absurd to say that form in art is in any sense a menace, because form is the absolute essence of art." What she is wary of, is the tendency to pull a form or a structure out of an idea and rest upon it. The form of good art must resist the easy patterns of fantasy and consolation. The writer, she insists, must keep in mind the natural selfishness and pointlessness of the universe (a bequest of the current philosophical and scientific tradition). These are non-consoling matters. Anything that consoles us for the "intolerably chancy and incomplete" nature of the world and life is a form created by the fantasy. A good form does not work as a magic nor does it permit the soul to relax its guard. It is non-consolatory in nature and shows suffering, death and reality without any thrill or colouring.

For a novelist basically concerned with the creation of a "complete and unclassifiable image" of reality with people's treatment of each other and moral values, the content is as important as the medium of its incarnation. Language is one of the modes of incarnation. Iris Murdoch insists upon an aesthetically disciplined language. She recognises, like Sartre, that language is properly a medium of communication but unlike him, she does not resort to make a distinction between language used in prose and in poetry. For Sartre, the
language of prose is discursive and simply meant for communication. It is like a "transparent glass" through which we can look at the world. The language of poetry, on the contrary, is non-discursive and opaque, being a structure of the external world. In her opinion, the distinction lies between the formless non-aesthetic use of language and the disciplined aesthetic use of it. This is applicable both to poetry and prose.

The modern attitude towards language has ended up in a highly self-conscious awareness of the relationships between words and things, leading to what Sartre has described as the "sickness of language". "We are like people who for a long time looked out of a window without noticing the glass—and then one day began to notice this too," we have the examples of Roquentin in Le Nausée who finds to his anguish that the word "seat" refuses to go and rest upon the thing and of Hugo in Under the Net for whom language itself is a machine for creating falsehoods. This neurotic distress over referential language has not only afflicted the philosophers but the novelists as well. Those like Murdoch who are inclined towards the realistic novel are particularly perplexed. Although they may share the philosopher's doubt of language and insist on particularity of experience yet as novelists they feel the necessity of utterance. Like Wittgenstein they cannot declare with sheer aplomb that,
"what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

Silence is not the solution to their problem, as Jake, the writer, discovered at the end of Under the Hat. The novel by nature is referential. It tells a story, and story telling demands discursive referential language. The novelist is rooted in the world where things are still things and words are still their names. She considers the writer as a truth-teller and a defender of words. She also passionately believes in the importance of stories, which is the ancient human way of recounting events. She sees the primitive force of stories as a way of preserving culture and language against the modern attack on words.

Murdoch deals with the problem of language and the general romantic attack on words by calling for more moral concepts and vocabulary lost under the impact of linguistic and existentialist behaviourism. In order to understand and attend to the dense substance of the reality of man, world and morality, she suggests the coining of new and persuasive concepts. In this direction literature and particularly the novel, can play a vital role as it deals with human situations and conduct. If literature is to perform its task of helping us to rediscover a sense of "density of our lives" and "arm us against consolation and fantasy" and all the other ailments of romanticism, it must recover its former glory. "Eloquence and discourse must return."
In Iris Murdoch's moral theory as well as in her aesthetics the definition of freedom entails a dispassionate adjustment of vision. This involves a combat against fantasy and all its moves towards form, pattern or mythmaking. Almost all her novels trace the progress of her central characters from a state of form-making fantasy to an awareness of reality which is the sign of freedom. In the beginning they are shown living in fantasy worlds with well-ordered, neat and explicable lives shielded from the pains, pressures and harshness of the contingent reality around them. In their smugness they do not perceive others as real human beings but see, through the veil of self-devised forms and opinions. Through various progressions and devices, love being the major one, they are able to redirect their attention away from the mirrors of self-obsession and achieve a state of realism and freedom.

This tug and pull between freedom and form is worked out at the levels of the author and the characters. It is displayed in the author as she liberates herself from her own fantasy in order to bestow reality on her characters. The characters on the other hand experience this tussle vis-a-vis the other characters in the novel. The reader too is not spared. He is presented with a work which is an "unclassifiable image" and he has to quell his illusions and expectations to have the accurate perception of it.
Her concept of freedom and the implications involved in it would, however, remain only an erudite abstraction if it is not studied in the context of her novels. It is in her novels that the viability of her definition can be judged, for that is where it acquires a living tissue. The succeeding chapters will therefore, concentrate on the study of some of her important novels in the light of this germinal concept and its fight against form.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


7. The 'Official' or 'Cartesian' theory was based on the binary classification of the mind and the body. According to it, events of the body take place in space. They are external, publicly observable events while mental activities are private and inaccessible.


12. Sartre describes two fundamental modes of being i.e. being-for-itself (le pour soi) and being-in-itself (l'en soi). The being-for-itself is the conscious subject (human being) while being-in-itself (e.g. a stone) is simply there.

   See also Frederick Copleston, S.J., p.196.

27. Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts", p.100.
34. Ibid., p.45.
35. See Jack Biles, p.120.
40. Iris Murdoch, The Fire and the Sun, p.34.
41. Ibid., p.36.
42. See George Whiteside, "The Novels of Iris Murdoch", Critique, 17 (Spring 1964), p.28.
43. Iris Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'", p.75.
44. Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts", p.94.
45. Ibid., p.71.
47. Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts", p.95.
52. Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness", p.27.
55. Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness", p.27.
60. W.J. Harvey, p.191.
63. Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p.79.
65. John Bayley writes, "What I understand by an author's love for his characters is a delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life; an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude, a respect for their freedom."


