Iris Murdoch holds a very important position among modern writers and she is deeply interested in the moral aspect of life. She is a philosopher, a moralist and a writer all rolled into one. She has attempted to probe into the complex recesses of the human mind and project the intricate aspects of the human personality. This projected personality in each novel is juxtaposed with similar or dissimilar personalities which are also the subjects of the author's scrutiny. All the characters which are brought to the limelight have complicated psychological facets which can be related to the social, individual, moral, religious, ethical and mythical concerns dealt with by Murdoch.

Murdoch does not profess any belief in any personal God; however in an interview with Slaymaker she says she has a strict moral sense.¹ She has endeavoured to present this attitude in her fiction. Her philosophical essays are full of her ideas and principles relating to morality. But in her novels the characters are presented in a contradictory manner as following entirely different types of morality. The difference between her strong
principles of morality and the principles followed by her characters is rather intriguing and it serves to arouse the interest of the readers. This interest is especially connected with the question of sin.

All her works beginning with Under the Net have a special feature. They can be read at a very simple superficial level of adventure and fantasy. At the same time the readers can find many layers and levels of ideas embedded within the external framework of the fiction. An attempt is made in the following pages to examine one of these many layers—her moral vision and particularly her concept of sin. This can be best studied by relating it to the social and religious concept of the present age.

The concept of sin in Murdoch's fiction is linked with the idea of freedom. Murdoch is fascinated by the problem of human freedom. Her definition of human freedom is different from the commonly understood idea of freedom. In a pair of articles published in 1959 "The Sublime and the Good" and "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited." Murdoch turns her attention towards the place of freedom in an aesthetic theory based on love. She feels that freedom is possible for those who can love and accept an object (human or non-human) which is other and distinct from the loving object. Murdoch says:
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.4

Hence in the philosophy of Murdoch, 'freedom' and 'love' are closely connected. As already mentioned, 'love' is the acceptance of the 'otherness' of another person, "the acceptance of this otherness in all its particularity and incomprehensibility is love, which as an aesthetic concern is freedom to know, understand and respect things quite alien to familiar points of view."5 This is the type of freedom Murdoch envisages. Any sort of freedom which deviates from this kind of knowledge, understanding and respecting of things and individuals is not correct according to her. Hence it can be branded as a 'sin'. "Freedom is rather concerned with self control, with just understanding, with the liberation of the person from irresponsible motives."6 She has further stressed her points regarding human freedom in an interview with Slaymaker. Here she says that she would "connect freedom with knowledge and with the ability to discipline emotion and to love and to live in some more disciplined and better way; that is freedom. If that is difficult, then
freedom is difficult. She admits that her views regarding human freedom have changed. Unbridled conduct, emotional unrestraint etc. are not freedom any more, in her opinion. Murdoch feels that human beings do lose their freedom through neurosis or obsession. She believes it to be part of a good life that we become more free through self-knowledge and through being able to get out of ourselves and really see things which are outside us.

Murdoch's idea of liberation of the self is connected very closely with the religious idea. She has mentioned the perception of reality as the most important aspect in the growth of the personality of an individual. This perception of reality is possible only if the 'self' is liberated. The liberation means that the 'self' is to be freed from selfish passion, neurosis, convention, cruelty, egoism etc. All the narrow, selfish desires, urges, ideas and wishes of an individual will be curtailed only when this liberation is attained.

The Hindu philosophy has given great importance to this idea of the liberation of the self. The sorrows, troubles, misery etc. are all caused by the bondage of the world exercised upon the individual. When the true knowledge arrives the 'self' of the individual gets liberated from the fetters of the world. Thus the 'truth'
enables a person to get unattached and thus liberated. Only such a liberated individual can see reality. Gautama Buddha, Swami Vivekananda, and the other great religious leaders have pointed to this important fact. Murdoch has been attracted by the Eastern and Buddhist idea of liberation, *nirvana* etc.

The moralistic vision of Murdoch is not based on any conventional religion. She feels that moral discipline is possible and necessary for an individual even if he doesn't believe in a personal God. In the interview with Slaymaker, Murdoch says that a religion which serves in curtailing any evil feeling such as envy, jealousy, resentment or desire for revenge is important. In that sense religion is important because it gives people a picture of the world which is not materialistic. Thus an ideal freedom is connected with goodness and virtue. Murdoch feels that spiritual freedom is very difficult to attain because the original urges of human being are bad ones. These base urges and desires would hinder the freedom of a person. Thus the mind of a person which is not freed from these urges can be considered as being in a state of sin. Such a person's actions, behaviour and thoughts will be controlled by the sinful ideas or the evil intentions in his mind. This is exactly what Murdoch has attempted to depict in her novels.
The first novel written by Murdoch was *Under the Net*, published in 1954. From the first novel to the last one *The Good Apprentice*, published in 1985, all her works are concerned with the thoughts and actions of characters who have a moralistic or amoralistic vision. Her characters are complex beings, not simple people motivated by simple impulses. Often they are found to be bundles of complexes and idiosyncrasies and some are far-gone cases of psychological aberration.

Even in the first novel all these types of characters can be found. Jake Donaghue, the hero of *Under the Net*, is in a constant quest to find a solution for his material and abstract problems. He is pictured as a self-centred man who can't enjoy being responsible for other people. At the same time he loves being protected and relishes being a parasite on his friends. In the beginning of the novel Jake finds that his creative urges as a writer have been silenced. Murdoch has pointed out that art is the vision of love as it is separate from the messiness of ordinary love relationships, which become enmeshed in the mechanism of the possessive ego. She believes that only art, especially literature, can bring salvation to the human race. Ultimately, the unified transcendent reality Murdoch seeks is love: "It is the Platonic love of a vision of goodness, truth and beauty
which liberates and makes us open to the good." Here Jake Donaghue is in an egoistic condition and his creative faculties are in an almost dried up situation. William Slaymaker has stated that in the novels of Murdoch she depicts a situation where freedom is difficult. "The determining forces of the overpowering psychic selfish ego and the mechanical, physical and physical drives combine to make freedom not a matter of degree, but an unrealizable dream." Jake has not attained his freedom. So he does not have a vision of reality and is unable to create a work of art, though he is a writer. This inability occurs because art and truth are inter-related. By the distinctive philosophical influence of Hugo upon Jake towards the end of the novel, Jake is able to give a new response to people. This is clear from the way he accepts Anna. He realized that Anna existed as a separate being and not as a part of himself. Thus Jake has come to a recognition of the individuality of persons. He realizes the need to conceive things and individuals as they really are and not as he pleases. We see that he has achieved a renewal of his creative energy. This renewal of the creative energy can be understood as a redemption for the sinner, Jake Donaghue.

In her next novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter* there are a group of characters. Their lives revolve
round the mysterious figure of Mischa Fox. He is pictured as an enchanter and all those who surround him try to break the spell and flee from the enchanter. Mischa Fox, the enchanter, has a disconcerting alter ego which one has to force oneself to get past. In this novel also, as in Under the Net, the inability of a person to accept the 'otherness' of another person is highlighted. For example, Rosa fails to observe properly the individual life and needs of Nina but they are there to be observed, and Rosa can learn. Later on Nina commits suicide in total disappointment. She is aware of her predicament before her death: "She was without identity in a world where to be without identity is the first and most universal of crimes, the crime which, whatever else it may overlook, every State punishes." Here we come across the helplessness of an individual, without identity, in the modern society. But the more important aspect of sin is supplied by the 'ego' of Mischa Fox. Obsessed by suffering, caught in its machinery, he sees power as protection and protection paradoxically leads to destruction; he is compelled to destroy what he protects, from chickens, to 'slaves', to women. In The Sovereignty of God Murdoch argues against the idea of suffering which is a romantic idea. In Theology, Kierkegaard makes emotional pain the grounds for salvation. Murdoch has the
conviction that goodness begins in humility, "a selfless respect for reality." Introspection leads a person to look into himself. So he may see nothing else. To be good we have to look outward, at reality. If we try to expiate evil by suffering, it allows us to behave badly and to be redeemed by our own painful guilt. Thus we are led back into our own ego. This is the state of sin in which Mischa Fox finds himself.

In this context the idea of 'suffering' as presented by Murdoch can be compared with the Christian idea of suffering. The most essential reality, which is a painful one, is 'death'. She feels that the idea of death acts as an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves. At the same time one who is contemplating suffering gets a disproportionate idea about their permanence and thereby of his own importance. Thus we find that Murdoch projects the negative aspect of 'suffering'. This is contradictory to the Christian view. The Christian idea concentrates on the positive aspect of 'suffering'. The Bible has highlighted the values of suffering. Suffering leads to the reformation of the character of an individual, according to this viewpoint. Thus he attains perfection. These two ideas are the two sides of the same coin. The one deals with the ennobling effect of suffering and the other deals with the adverse
effect of suffering. The effect of suffering depends on the manner in which it is projected by the individual. In her novels Murdoch has presented suffering as in the *Flight from the Enchanter*.

The *Sand Castle* is a novel written in a naturalistic manner, elaborated by symbols. It is an ordinary story, set in very humdrum and limited surroundings. It is the story of the love of a middle-aged school master, Bill Mor—who has a sarcastic wife (Nan) and two adolescent children—for a young and beautiful woman painter (Rain Curter) who has been invited to the school to paint the portrait of the retiring headmaster. The *Sand Castle* image reflects on Rain's illusory relationship with Mor, which dies of 'dryness'; and also connects her influence on Mor's dryness with that of the rains she symbolizes. Murdoch has expressed her view regarding the creation of a work of art in her *Against Dryness*. She feels that reality is not a given whole and only by a respect for the contingent, imagination can replace fantasy. Reality as found in our life is incomplete and hence art which is a reflection of reality can also be incomplete. John Bayley in his book *Characters of Love* has argued that the contemporary impatience with the idea of 'character' as an attempt to create a unique individual is a sign both of a literary and of a moral failing. We can see that this
tolerance is applied by Murdoch in her character delineation as well as in her philosophy pertaining to the human relationships. The acceptance of another individual with all the defects, weaknesses, imperfections and angularities is the correct moralistic approach for her. This broad-mindedness is termed acceptance of the 'otherness of another person' as mentioned in her philosophical essays.

In The Sand Castle the feeling of freedom and vitality Mor experiences is significant when he thinks he has chosen a life with Rain. But he fails to carry out his choice. He is not convinced of his future with Rain and there lies his failure. He doesn't bring himself to admit this relationship to his wife and thus fails to get his freedom. So in the physical sense, Mor is unable to get his freedom either from the clutches of his wife or from the relationship with Rain. He is following an illusion until he is brought to the harsh reality.

The manifestations of sin in different manners and at different levels can be found in A Severed Head. The characters of this novel Martin, Georgie, Antonia, Honor, Palmer et al. can be found indulging in various types of sins. Martin is the personification of disloyalty in married life maintaining several extra marital
relationships. Palmer and Martin are indulging in a homosexual alliance. Palmer has incestuous relationship with his sister, Honor. Similarly Antonia is portrayed as inconsistent in her married life. Georgie is also involved in many 'love' adventures and attempted suicide before finally she leaves for New York. Along with these graver kinds of sins, a lot of minor kinds of foibles are mentioned casually in the course of the novel. By juxtaposing these outwardly negligible types of sins with the serious and disastrous types of sins Murdoch has tried to remind us that the outwardly simple looking sins are not so really. In ordinary life man has the tendency to classify sins as simple, moderate and grave. But this sort of classification is not permissible in the opinion of Murdoch. From the Christian point of view also the sinful deed is dependent on the mental condition which had prompted the deed. Jesus Christ has expressed His readiness to accept and forgive grave sinners who are found guilty by the society. But he points an accusing finger towards those who have no purity of heart. In A Served Head such impurities are brought out very well. Martin's hypocrisy is evident here. "Meanwhile, it was important to me, even very important, that Antonia should think me virtuous; and with that degree of self-deception which is essential to a prolonged and successful
masquerade, I even felt virtuous." When the marriage between Antonia and Martin breaks up, the mentality of Rosemary clearly shows the common, base feeling or ordinary human beings. She had never quite got on with Antonia and would on the one hand be delighted at what had happened while on the other she would maintain a conventional air of distress—distress such as persons feign at the death of an acquaintance, and which is in fact a glow of excitement and pleasure; and like most people whose marriages have failed she had a sharp appetite for news of other failed marriages. This sort of mentality which is considered a harmless, simple condition is denounced because it affects the purity of the mind. A man who leads an innocent life with purity of heart is considered 'temperate' as explained in the second chapter of this dissertation. The 'continent' group are those who strive and get over these kinds of inherent wrong feelings. But those who indulge in these feelings and act according to these wicked tendencies are as good as sinners.

A French philosopher Jules de Gauthier has stated that we have a tendency to try to be what we are not, to be what the society in which we are brought up thinks is desirable. This idea has always interested Murdoch. She vehemently criticises the inability of individuals, and
writers especially, to see reality. Her definition of freedom is: "To be free is something like this—to exist sanely without fear and to perceive what is real."

Through her novels she affirms that this sort of freedom is not easy to attain. The French philosopher mentioned above also has pointed out this aspect of freedom. The lack of freedom forces us to be what we are not, outwardly. The conflict between our true self and the exposed, false self would result in a lot of mental, physical and spiritual conflict as depicted in the works of Murdoch. This is the major theme of her works.

Benjamin Khan has mentioned that moral philosophy includes obligation and inclination. Obligations pertain to the higher nature of man and inclination to the lower nature of man. According to this moral philosophy the sense of obligation would prompt a man to do what is right and to pursue what is good. Murdoch has stated in her philosophical articles that this sense of obligation is the real freedom to be expected. Only such a disciplined freedom would enable us to perceive reality.

The Bell, a major novel by Murdoch has gained popularity as a novel which has aroused interest in many ways. From the point of view of sin also this novel can be considered very relevant. As a philosopher Murdoch has
been always fascinated by the dilemma of the twentieth century individuals. She says:

We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facile idea of sincerity... 

So she realizes that the relationship between life and literature has collapsed. The loss of moral concepts results in a personality which is unfit for prose literature, which in turn is unfit because it cannot perform its essential functions of teaching and delighting, lacking as it does an appropriate human subject. Murdoch insists that this real predicament has to be reflected in the novels. This is exactly what she is striving to do.

As has already been mentioned in this chapter, her concept of personality is connected with 'love' and 'freedom'. "Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves." So it can be said that love is a function of freedom, that is once one is free to know, understand and respect things other than oneself, one can love that otherness. The Bell has
projected her ideas about freedom, otherness, love etc. Through these expositions, the idea of sin also is pronounced in this novel. Even minor characters in this novel through their conversation bring out the ideas of Murdoch regarding sin and suffering. For example, Mrs. Mark in her conversation with Dora about the inmates of the Abbey says that just as we think that the sinner is better than he is when we imagine that suffering ennobles him, so we do less than justice to the saint when we think that his sacrifices grieve him in the way that they would grieve us. Murdoch always has the opinion that mere suffering wouldn't ennoble a person. He may retreat into egoism and fantasy and thus fail to see the reality. Michael, the main character in The Bell is presented at first as one who is looking into himself. He realises the presence of "some active and positive spring of evil within himself. Michael Meade had the awareness of his own perversion. From the age of fourteen he had been involved in homosexual affairs. At first he doesn't find his sexual habits to be against his religious belief. Later on, towards the end of the student days when the idea of becoming a priest took shape with reality in his mind, Michael awoke to the inconsistencies of his position. He knew that even the attraction, his religion had for him and his love of God were corrupted. This
attitude of Michael continues throughout the course of the novel, prompting him to indulge in immoral actions again and again. Since he doesn't look outwards to perceive reality, he doesn't get the real freedom. Towards the escape of Toby (after confessing to James), reality slowly dawns upon him. He realises that real faith in God is utterly remote from his own emotions, hopes, experiences etc. The pattern which he had seen in his life had been only his romantic imagination. There was no pattern at the end. True humility descends upon him. He knows that there is only very little of him left now and that he has diminished. This awareness of reality that leads to humility is freedom as visualized by Murdoch. The only character represented in this manner is Michael. He alone comes to a perception of reality and the true knowledge of his sins. We find that Michael is able to acknowledge and accept the 'otherness' of the characters like Dora, Toby, and James along with this realisation. He develops a tolerant attitude towards all these people, accepting them as they are. Thus a true moralistic approach is taken up by Michael. At the same time he states that there is a God, but that he doesn't believe in Him. This is the projection of Murdoch's own approach to this subject. She says that she doesn't believe in God,
but she considers religion an important factor for curtailing the base urges in the individuals.

All her novels have a certain relevance when considered from the point of view of sin analysis. Murdoch offers an explanation for the presence of supernatural elements in her books, which is analogous to Freud's explanation of its presence in life. She uses these elements, she says, because "... in an age such as ours, where the world of religion and God and gods has become completely problematic, there are more psychological forces working loose, as it were, as if they were demons or spirits." So when organised religion and the other social forces which control man's inner life disintegrate, the primitive drives are released. Thus the uncanny, supernatural elements in her novels are connected to primitive psychic drives. There is a constant struggle between the primitive psychic drives and the religious and social forces in her novels. Whether narrated in a natural manner or using supernatural elements this struggle is present in all her novels. Her novels An Unofficial Rose, The Unicorn, The Italian Girl, The Red and Green, The Time of the Angels etc. come under this category. We find the inherent, evil, psychic urges opposed to the disciplined, religious and moral principles in all these novels. Most of the characters in all these
novels indulge in extra marital relationships, homosexuality, lesbianism, jealousy, deceit, misusing of power, denying of basic freedom to others etc. Marriage is presented as a 'dangerous machine'. Even the character who is presented as carrying the burden of sins of the others is seen to be the victim of her own muddled private dream. For example, Ann, Randall's wife (An Unofficial Rose) is presented as a good character in this novel, on moralistic terms. About her Christian piety it is said: "Randall, who did not share it, tolerated it; but had been much less ready, as he put it, to see his daughter 'godded'."31 She feels the temptations driving her from the correct path. But since she has a firm religious background, she tries to adhere to the moralistic principles. About the people, like Ann in An Unofficial Rose Murdoch has mentioned in an interview: "Some people who are not bad find themselves so situated that they are unable to stop themselves from doing the greatest possible harm they can to others. It is an evident feature of human psychology that people have secret dream lives."32 This statement is applicable in the case of Ann. She follows the codes of morality and tries to lead a perfect life, controlling her evil urges, desires etc. But for her husband Randall she is somebody entirely different. He feels that she is his destroyer. "She has
got a kind of openness, which makes whatever I do meaningless." According to the philosophy of Murdoch, Ann can be considered a character of convention. Randall himself has stated that Ann lives by rules and that her acts don't have places. The character James in The Bell is similar to Ann in The Unofficial Rose. Both live conventionally by outward rules. They believe in God outside themselves. In all their actions they are controlled by their religious principles. Here the defect of these characters is that the conventional approach causes inability to see the primitive needs of others. Ann fails to see the inner life of herself and others. She doesn't attain moral growth because of conventionality. Hence she fails to love and accept the otherness of her husband, Randall. At the end of the novel, we find Ann in a vindictive mood. As in the case of the previous novels, here we don't find Ann coming to an understanding of reality. She feels she couldn't accept Randall as he is. So Ann doesn't attain the vision of reality here.

In the novel The Unicorn Hannah is the character who submissively yields to the punishment for her sinful act. While she was suffering the punishment, she was under a kind of spiritual spell which had protected herself and also the others connected with the house. But once she
breaks her vow, disasters follow one after the other. Those who had indulged in sin with her namely Peter, Pip and Gerald are killed. About Hannah's suffering Denis tells Marian: "You cannot come between her and her suffering, it is too complicated, too precious . . ." But her suffering doesn't save Hannah. The idea of Murdoch about the negative aspect of suffering is highlighted here. Suffering keeps her imprisoned in herself. She never attains the vision of reality and freedom. Therefore finally Hannah ends up in disaster. In this novel, Murdoch once again confirms her idea about God:

God is the distant source of light, it is the unimaginable object of our desire. Our fallen nature knows only its name and its perfection. That is the idea which is vulgarised by existentialists and linguistic philosophers when they make good into a mere matter of personal choice. It cannot be defined, not because it is a function of our freedom, but because we do not know it.  

Instead of attaining a vision of reality and truth, Hannah 'resorted to spirituality. She tried to be religious, and thus satisfied her 'ego' which led to her own disaster. She became a false God in the eyes of others but
gradually drifted once again into corruption and thus became unreal. Her sin reveals the reality to the others. Another character, Effingham in this novel realizes the reality at the moment of death. Murdoch feels that death is the reality which would bring humility into the mind of human beings. Only this humility would enable us to see reality. Effingham attains the spiritual light and he realises his nothingness. This phenomenon has been explained by Murdoch in her essay “The Sovereignty of Good.” It states that “death is the painful reality which teaches that we are nothing and arouses our concern with what is not ourselves.” Thus Effingham attains goodness at the last moment.

The character Otto in The Italian Girl laments because he can’t redeem himself from the mess his own life has become. He can’t feel even any proper regret about it. He is caught in a machine. Evil is a sort of machinery. He can’t even suffer properly because he enjoys the suffering. That suffering is consolation. But Otto feels that one does not need suffering but truth. If he could see the truth, he would definitely be a better man. He attempted to know the truth with the help of Elsa, but realised that it was not the truth. It ends in doom. After aborting her pregnancy Flora says to Edmund: “Men can moralise! But whoever heard about the problem of
unmarried fathers? They haven't any problem!*38 Here the Christian code of morality is overthrown by the characters of this novel. Murdoch has portrayed the confused condition of the society where the codes of morality are overruled. She doesn't approve of this condition. She has expressed her wish to attain the 'freedom' which would help in perceiving the reality. But she has also admitted that this sort of freedom and perception of reality is not easily attainable. A character David Levkin manipulates the statements of Jesus Christ to defend his own evil actions. He himself admits that he had caused offence worth being thrown into the sea with a millstone at the neck but says that only he who is without sin could cast the first stone. Isabel and Edmund can be regarded as the characters who come across reality finally.

In the Second Chapter of this dissertation it was stated that though immorality is a great vice, the worst sins are those leading to spiritual wrong. Most of the characters of Murdoch do not belong to the group who are spiritually wrong. They sin physically more than spiritually. The impurity of the heart which is derived by Jesus Christ cannot be considered the stigma of Murdoch's characters. That can be one of the reasons, the author finds to strive for their redemption. The struggle
is found in most of her works but 'freedom' is attained only by a few. This is because of the fact that the knowledge of reality and freedom is not easy to attain in this world where one is guided by ego and selfishness. The difficulty to attain purity and perfection is seen even in the failure of the community at Imber Court in The Bell. They fail in the attempt to lead a separate, devout life. The actions of the characters in her novel are justified by rationality. This mode of applying rationality is similar to the "spurious kind of rationality man invents for himself." Man has the tendency to defend his thought and deeds with the armour of rationality. But this rationality is usually false and the individual deceives himself and the others with this. Self-justification is a method of applying this rationality and that prevents a man from spiritual progress. He finds explanations for all his evil urges, desires and actions and continues to wallow in them. This prevents him from attaining release from the sinful condition. Only the one who is able to realise his own defects and sins would get the opportunity to see his true self. This would arouse humility in him and subsequently a perception of the reality. Thus he would get liberalised from the 'self' and attain freedom.
One of the factors that corrupt the individual is 'power'. The corruption due to power is the main subject of *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Mischa Fox exercises his power on all the others around him. This provides him scope for cruelty, sexual perversions etc. Here we are reminded of the maxim: "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely," as expounded by Lord Acton. Only when an individual visualises reality and becomes absolutely free, can he realise the futility and meaninglessness of this worldly power. "Mischa Fox's methods and his willingness to play God pervert even his own good intentions." This accusation about Mischa Fox is comparable to the condition of certain characters of Greene like Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* and the Whiskey priest in *The Power and The Glory*. The characters are projected by the two authors in outwardly different ways but both are accused of the same kind of evil. Mischa Fox is a despicable character whereas the characters of Greene in spite of their mundane nature and the human weaknesses are morally superior.

Murdoch strives to bring her characters out of their introspection. They are drawn out so as to look at the others and at the outward reality. This is the heart of the morality envisaged by Murdoch. She doesn't agree with the psychoanalysis of Freud. Too much of looking into the
self wouldn't help an individual to become good. Similarly Murdoch feels that convention and neurosis are the ailments of the modern man. Convention would lead an individual into a life of pattern, where too much of importance is given to primitive internal reality. Neurosis gives too much importance to external reality. Both these would become enemies of love and morality. In The Sublime and The Beautiful Revisited, Murdoch states that both conventions and neurosis are the enemies of love. But in the modern world it is difficult to escape from the one without invoking the help of the other. ‘Convention’ is the force which drives ordinary language man, who believes that moral issues are simple: these are rules and choices and an existing decorum made by a civilized society. ‘Neurosis’ drives totalitarian man who sees the world and his life as a dramatic myth, who requires his life to have an absolute form and purpose. In her essay “Against Dryness” she has disguised these two archetypal modern ideas of man. She feels both these images of the human self to be inadequate. Both these images represent the egoistic nature of man. The ordinary language man is responsible for his actions and he is the monarch of all he surveys. The totalitarian man’s highest value is his own will and his own assertion of his solitary self in a hostile society. Many of the characters
of Murdoch can be grouped as conventional or neurotic but both these groups have been depicted in her works as failures. They don't gain spiritual success or worldly success. The real success is gained by those who liberate themselves and accept others. One of the moral and aesthetic terms of Murdoch is 'attention'. This is the attempt made by an individual to see everything (people, situations, objects etc.) as they really are. Such attention would lead to accurate vision and proper action. So in Murdoch's philosophy the concept of attention is closely related to the concept of good or goodness.

The characters of most of Murdoch's novels can be categorised into the conventional or neurotic group. In her novel The Red and The Green, the female character Kathleen follows conventions. But her husband Barney can be considered a 'totalitarian man' who is given to neurosis. Barney had been ordained a priest but later on enticed into a sinful path. Even when he realises his mistake he can't redeem himself. Finally he decides to confess everything to his wife, and to give up the sinful path and start a new life with his wife. But his repentance is not accepted by his wife. Here both the representations of modern man are proved to be insufficient and inadequate to gain meaning in life. This is one of the ideas Murdoch has stated in her
philosophical writings and has tried to substantiate through her novels. Kathleen, one who follows the conventions and leads a pious, prim sort of life is pictured as a sour, loathsome, abominable creature. This idea is akin to that depicted in the works of Greene. Louise of *Heart of the Matter* etc. belongs to this type.

The character Barney had decided to be a priest and serve God. "He constantly pictured himself as it was soon to be, holding the very body of Christ in his hand and feeding a starving kneeling flock which stretched away to the confines of the earth. At nights he dreamed of the chalice from which the blood of his Master streamed, to take away the sins of the world." But Millie came to arouse a blasphemous passion within Barney and his feeling turned evil: "He became horribly incarnate; and when the desperately desirable Millie looked meltingly into his eyes and inclined her warm lips slowly upon his, he felt that God was become man indeed." Finally he lost his priesthood as well as Millie and in the derelict condition he turned to Kathleen. He had tried to turn his carnal desire into a spiritual bliss. But he had miserably failed in the attempt. His spiritual desire had been thwarted and his carnal desire also had been insatiable. Finally he tried to bring about a compromise by resorting to an unconsummated married life. But Kathleen only
served to arouse his guilt feeling. She was his spiritual adversary. He felt that he would have been a good man if he had not married this woman. Her piety stood in his way to regain his innocence. His mental agony, agony for suffering and redemption, finally finds a solution when a new light reaches him. He felt that he had attained the 'freedom' to win the promised grace. Thus Barney, in spite of his countless sins, is seen as a redeemed man at the end of the story whereas the pious Kathleen is left deserted.

Barney's character is comparable to certain characters of Greene's novels especially the Whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory*. Here the priest had committed a sin and suffered under its burden till the end. But in Murdoch's novel the character Barney in spite of the fact that he had deviated from the spiritual path ordained for him, finally gets himself free and reconciled with God. The Whiskey priest also finally gets a vision of the mercy of God and his own salvation.

An important statement in *The Time of the Angels* would reveal the attitude of modern man towards sin and morality. Leo comments: "I want to train myself in immorality, really get these old conventions out of my system, so whenever I have a chance to tell a lie I do so."
Values are only relative anyway, there are no absolute values. According to Miss Murdoch this is the state of modern man. He doesn't accept any absolute value and would prefer to live according to his own will. This sort of life is actually away from the 'real freedom'. Real freedom always means, a life which is properly disciplined. The view of Leo is countered by that of Marcus in the same novel. He was writing a book entitled *Morality in a World Without God*. Marcus's intention was to rescue the idea of an absolute in morals by showing it to be implied in the unavoidable human activity of moral evaluation at its most unsophisticated level, and in doing this to eschew both theological metaphor and the crudities of the existentialism which was the nemesis of academic philosophy. Murdoch has reiterated in her essays and interviews, the necessity of a moralistic vision and approach, even if there is not any accepted faith, religion or God.

The struggle between a moralistic view and an amoralistic view is seen in the conflict between Leo and Marcus in *The Time of the Angels*. Marcus strives to bring about a moralistic theory without the interference of God and religion. Whenever Leo tries to get away from the clutches of morals, Marcus reminds him that it is not easy. "You've always imagined that you could just give up
morals, but it's not so easy. You're not as free as you think. Later on we find Leo himself admitting this truth. At the same time, in the same novel we find Carel who continues to be a priest even though he doesn't believe in God and indulges in all sorts of blasphemous deeds. We see Carel as a damned figure and even those associated with him (Elizabeth and Muriel) seem to be eternally damned. Marcus feels anguish because he couldn't redeem Carel. Carel's black philosophy had been his own damnation. Murdoch expresses her view on suffering through the words of Eugene in this novel. Pattie wants to give meaning to her life by her devotion to those who suffered. Eugene asked: "Must one really, to help the sufferer, suffer oneself? A purely good person would do so automatically just like Jesus Christ did. Murdoch feels that deliberate suffering would lead to the inflation of the 'ego' which would obscure reality from the individual.

The novel The Nice and the Good brings to light the views of Murdoch regarding the state of being nice and the state of being good. The former refers to being externally satisfactory and the latter refers to being essentially good. Once again she affirms that 'purity of the heart' is the most important thing in the life of an individual. Ducane is the character in this novel who
strives to maintain the purity of heart. He endeavours to remain 'good'. When he deviates into a sinful path, it is relevant that he is haunted by the pricking of conscience.

About his affair with Jessica he reflects: "He felt a rational guilt too at keeping this young attractive girl for himself when he did not intend to marry her. Ducane who liked his life to be simple, did not care for concealments and feelings of guilt." He felt that it was a case of seeing and approving the better and doing the worse, when he resorted to evil paths. John Ducane was aware of the muddle he had created for himself and the others like Jessica. In all aspects of his sinful constitution, John Ducane has full realisation. He prevents himself from becoming egoistic and this can be considered his 'goodness'. When he traps another character Biranneq he feels intense satisfaction, but soon he recognizes his defect. "Biranne as a sinner and as a man in a trap was no longer a menace to consciousness, and Ducane gave himself no credit for an interest which he recognized as having more to do with power than with compassion. . . ." Ducane is constantly aware of the evil within him. While asking Mc Grath about the death of Radeechy he performs a self analysis. "The evil is in me. There are demons and powers outside us, Radeechy played with them, but they are pygmy things. The great evil, the
real evil, is inside myself. It is I who am Lucifer. John Ducane's self-realisation can be compared with that of Greene's characters. In the novel The Brighton Rock Pinkie is a character who always realises his evil nature and ascertains that he is damned. Similarly John Ducane realises that he cannot pity the wretched or be of hope or comfort to the damned. He recognises that his idea about himself as good is the greatest sin because it prevents him from doing good for others. This idea about real goodness visualized by Murdoch is repeated in the thoughts of Theo, in the presence of Willy (both characters of the same novel):

The point is that nothing matters except loving what is good. Not to look at evil but to look at good. Only this contemplation breaks the tyranny of the past, breaks the adherence of evil to the personality, breaks, in the end, the personality itself. In the light of the good, evil can be seen in its place, not owned, just existing, in its place.

Towards the end Theo is seen getting an idea about the worldly and self-gratifying love as opposed to self-less, impersonal love.
From the above mentioned novel onwards especially we can find that more importance is given to guilt feeling, remorse, penitence etc. in the novels of Murdoch. Bruno in the novel *Bruno’s Dream* is found to be thinking about the idea of being good, getting repentance etc. He wished to believe in death-bed repentance and instantaneous salvation. The idea of purgatory was consoling, that is to survive and suffer in the eternal embrace of a totally just love.53

As a novelist and as a philosopher Murdoch is concerned with the human tendency to see the world through the distortion of fantasy. Hence the individual gets only a false vision of the world and he views at the others as only a means of fulfilling his own desires. Thus the individual fails to get the realisation about the ‘reality’ or ‘otherness’ of the others. In the novels of Murdoch the view is implied that goodness comes through allowing or even promoting destruction of oneself in order to prevent oneself from destroying others. In the world Murdoch portrays separation is all but impossible, and characters are judged as moral not because they recognize a separate reality, but because they refuse to exercise power over those who are inescapably linked to them.54 Murdoch seems to be obsessed also with the concept that the attainment of perfection is impossible
in the positive sense. By curbing the urges, desires and evil tendencies which are inherent in him it is impossible for the common man to attain ‘freedom’ or the realisation of reality. On the contrary, we find some of her characters attaining a sort of negative perfection. Such characters become more and more conscious about their own evils and defective traits. Even when behaving outwardly in an exemplary perfect manner internally, they are conscious about the base forces which are driving them towards the external perfection. This realisation serves to make them nearly perfect in the eyes of the author as well as the readers.

This view is akin to the Christian view about the relevance of sin and the awareness about it. All human beings are liable to sin and one who does not listen to the words of Jesus Christ would continue to sin and he would die in his sins. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Here Christ is pointing out that only an individual who is aware of his sinful state can try to become better and attain perfection. This view is upheld by Murdoch also when she presents characters who feel repentant and guilty for their sins to the point of trying to improve their actions. But she doesn’t approve of suffering and introspection which would
lead to egoism. Such an egoistic condition would take away the individual from the reality of the self.

This difference between 'apparent' goodness and 'genuine' goodness is defined by Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*. He thinks:

We desire to be richer, handsomer, cleverer, stronger, more adored and more apparently good than any one else. I say 'apparently' because the average man while he covets real wealth, normally covets only apparent good. The burden of genuine goodness is appreciated as intolerable and a desire for it won't put out of focus the other and ordinary wishes by which one lives. Of course very occasionally and for an instant even the worst of men may wish for goodness.\(^5\)

In *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* the different facets of sin as projected in different individuals living in different situations are very clearly portrayed. All human beings are primarily bothered about their own existence. The 'good' which they are searching for would be that which contributes to this existence. They would try to justify all their actions in this light. The
characters, Blaise, Harriet, Emily et al. in this novel can be understood in this context. Blaise can be seen leading a deceitful life, associating with two ladies at the same time. Sometimes he regrets his lost innocence but he knows that he has to continue in this sinful state without any hope of redemption. He is inactive and does not make any attempt to rescue himself. Even after admitting and confessing his sins he opts to lead a life with Emily thus discarding Harriet. Harriet here is a projection of another dimension of sin. She had exulted in her power over Blaise and Emily. She had spiritual superiority over them who had both been spiritually wrong. As long as she can exercise her power, she remains angelic. But once she is discarded, the true, evil nature is brought out. She discards her conventional mode of life and makes advances to Monty, another character of the novel. Finally she dies and Emily and Blaise continue their marital life in a guiltless, complacent manner. Thus in this novel, Harriet who is given to ‘conventions’ and Blaise who is given to ‘neurosis’ are left in their own predicament without any redemption. Murdoch has argued that “contingency is the essence of personality” and in all her works we see that the characters are ruled by the situations and not by set theories.
There is close resemblance between the character Cato in *Henry and Cato* by Murdoch and the Whiskey priest in *The Power and The Glory*. Both are priests. Cato is, in the beginning, full of belief in God. He experiences God and his expression of love. This vision of God had saved him from egoism. He became a priest and he was extremely happy. He had enjoyed all the bliss of communion with God, when suddenly he started losing his faith. A homosexual relationship is started with Joe but finally he loses Christ as well as Joe. Cato's father makes a significant comment here:

I don't believe in all those myths and legends and I think the notion of survival after death is the most morally debilitating idea ever invented, but I believe in the good life and in trying to be a good man and in telling the truth—I think that's at the centre of it all, telling the truth, always trying to find out the truth, not tolerating any lie or any half-lie—it's the half-lies that kill the spirit. You, I'm not such a Philistine as you think.

Cato finally makes an attempt to regain his belief in Christ. He struggles to get over his guilt feeling through worthy repentance. Thus the story ends on an
optimistic note as does the story of the Whiskey priest. The readers feel that his spirit also is saved and not damned. Murdoch herself has stated that Christ travels with her. She was a Christian as a child but she didn't believe in the supernatural aspects of Christianity. Similarly she didn't believe in God but she thought morality is fundamental to human life.\textsuperscript{59} This same attitude is expressed by Anne Cavidge in \textit{Nuns and Soldiers}. But finally Anne gets a glorious vision of Jesus Christ who tells her to do right and to keep away from wrong. The only time for a man is to abstain from sins. The true meaning of God can be found only in love.

In her novel \textit{The Sea, The Sea} Murdoch has pointed out that guilt feelings often arise from accusations rather than from crimes or sins.\textsuperscript{60} The author mentions a common psychology here. The man has the tendency to justify all his actions however mean they may be. This would result in the man becoming self-satisfied. But when he is accused by another person, naturally, his complacency will be shaken and this would give him an opportunity to realise his sin. Thus here Murdoch is referring to the duty of the society to redeem a person from a sinful path. It is the duty of the society to see that the individual adheres to a moralistic path.
In her later novels like *The Philosopher's Pupil*, *The Good Apprentice* and *The Book and The Brotherhood* we find a re-echoing of her philosophy that had been expressed through her earlier works. The author comes to the conclusive idea that all human beings are the mixture of good and evil. Similarly the idea of being beyond good and evil is considered only a vulgar illusion. Only a vulgar magician or a self-less scholar can prefer knowledge to virtue. Only this knowledge would enable a person to become 'free' and 'liberated'. The knowledge of death and its proximity would kill desire. This killing of the self and the desires of the self is real wisdom. But these realities are not applied in the lives of the characters and they are left in a perplexed condition. Their beliefs in God, religion, Christianity, morality etc. are in a total muddle. The modern man feels that science has abolished the difference between good and evil and that there isn't anything deep in morality. In the novel *The Good Apprentice* the character Stuart tries to establish a sort of religion that keeps love of goodness in the lives of people. It would be a religion without God or supernatural dogmas but it had to have some spiritual ideal and discipline. This attitude of Stuart is accused as false goodness. The real religion is that which requires us to die to the world. Murdoch is
favourable to the Eastern idea, that death means the
destruction of the ego. Through this novel she once again
upholds the idea of nirvana, the cessation of all selfish
desires. Thus the destruction of the body would lead to
the liberation of the soul. Finally the author comes to
the conclusion that muddle and corruption is inevitable
in the modern world. The pure dedicated life is only an
illusion. The good is destroyed by chance. The guilty
feeling still remains in the mind of the characters when
some disaster occurs. The good and evil do not avail in
her later novels. Everything remains an illusion. This
idea is revealed through her essays, interviews etc. A
disciplined, moralistic life is absolutely essential in
the modern world where the predicament of individuals has
become problematic. But this discipline is not easily
attainable. Her concept of sin is closely related to the
lack of discipline which she has visualised. Even when
the belief in God or religion can be discarded as
outdated in the modern society, strict adherence to
moralistic life is essential. In this chapter an attempt
was made to give a sketch of her moralistic vision in
relation to the religious (Christian) and social concept.
Though she has stated that she doesn't believe in
the supernatural aspects of Christianity, she has
whole-heartedly accepted the presence of Jesus Christ.
The image of Christ in the mind of the author as portrayed through her characters is dubious. She doesn't accept the 'suffering' of an individual because she concentrates upon the negative aspect of this suffering. Her argument is that suffering would lead a person to being self-satisfied and thus to becoming egoistic. She accepts the Eastern idea of nirvana whereby the desires of the self are curtailed, thus ending in the destruction of the self and the liberation of the soul. But this argument doesn't prove that Murdoch is against the Christian principle of sin and suffering. The Christian idea is concentrating upon the ennobling effect of suffering. A person who suffers as a result of his sin can be prompted to correct his path so as to return to the perfect path. This process essentially doesn't cause a boosting of the ego. So when considered in this manner, suffering helps in the improving of the personality. Murdoch has focused on the negative aspect of suffering, which enhances the 'ego' of a personality and obscures reality from him.

In the works of Murdoch she has clearly shown the state of modern man who is alienated from the society. She has tried to establish the inadequacies of existentialist and empirical thought that relies on self-centred standards of individual consciousness and
sincerity, rather than on other-centred values of virtue, love and imagination. At the same time she has probed into the mental agony of the individuals who are compelled to live in a society that has lost the religious sense. Greene has lamented the deterioration of the religious sense and the consequent importance of the human act. Though she cannot be directly considered a religious writer like Greene, it is obvious that she has a strict moral sense. Her work is concerned with that type of morality which helps the individual to perceive reality and to attain freedom. Her novels also try to establish that the human mind has the tendency to deform the reality with the help of fantasy and illusion. The despair she feels in the present condition of man and the inadequacy of the set theories to save man from the fantasy and illusion into a vision of reality find expression in the words of the characters of her novels. It can also be noted that the frustration, disappointment and futility she feels keep on increasing from the earlier to the more recent novels. In The Good Apprentice, for example, to Harry say Stuart and Edward. "No one can avoid muddle," said Harry, "no one can avoid corruption, the pure dedicated life is an illusion, the mere idea of it is a damaging lie, look at all the wickedness priests cause, they're as messy as we are only there's is a
conspiracy to keep it dark. The idea of goodness is a romantic opium, it's a killer in the end.\cite{64} The author is referring to the helpless state of modern man who deviates farther and farther from the moralistic path owing to the various fantasies, myths and illusions. But it is clear that she is not ready to give up her own faith in the adherence to a moralistic vision. She is cherishing the image of Christ in her mind and faith in moralistic discipline. She does not believe in the supernatural aspects of Christianity. She has a favourable attitude to Buddhism also because it preaches the annihilation of the ego. Denying the ‘ego’ would enable the individual to see the people around in a clearer manner. Thus the character who is represented as ‘good’ by Murdoch can be found getting a redeeming vision at least towards the end of the novel. In The Good Apprentice Stuart is a character who can’t give up his principles from the beginning to the end of the story. He wants to see the truth. He does not approve of telling lies because he feels that these lies would gradually detach a person from reality. Through characters like Stuart, the readers get a peep into the vision of Murdoch regarding morality as opposed to a sinful mode of life. She herself has admitted that she has felt much closer to
Christianity in the later years than when she was younger.65

Using her principles of morality she attempted to shatter the picture of the Sartrean individual, one who is self-confident, sovereign and self-realised. Such characters in her works are presented as failures. They turn out to be successes only when they attain 'co-existence' a word introduced by Murdoch in her first novel, Under the Net, which denotes love or the unselfish apprehension of another person's reality.66 The outwardly virtuous characters are condemned by Murdoch. This is the case of similar characters in the novels of Greene and Compton-Burnett also. The civilized, rational behaviour is not approved by Murdoch because she has the first opinion that reality is not at all rational. A person does not reveal his true self when he attempts to be civilized and rational outwardly. When irrationality in man is ignored that prevents him from attaining self-knowledge and considering other people. Such a morality is useless. To supplement her idea about irrationality, we see that even her concept of God or Christ is away from the rational, accepted idea. Anne in Nuns and Soldiers, for example, had lost faith in a personal God. The Christ she sees criticizes her desire for innocence as sentimental and repeatedly says that
salvation, goodness and miracles depend on her. Anne's personal religion is to follow a 'nomadic cosmic Christ' who is "a pathetic deluded disappointed man who had come to an exceptionally sticky end." Through such descriptions the author has tried to break up the picture of a conventional saviour and drive at the importance of a cosmic approach which should be the basis of true Christianity. Through such an approach a true vision of reality is obtained and the alienated individual gets 'freedom'.

The individual is alienated because of his existential, solipsistic view which rejects the 'reality'. He sees freedom, romance etc. in a perverse manner and tries to pursue it. So he relies on his personal values as his guide to morality. As a result, his character becomes distorted and he is cut off completely from others and society. This individual can be saved only by true morality. True morality grows out of actual encounters with others. Such an encounter can succeed only by an imaginative love which delights in the otherness of the other and such love is a knowledge to be equated with the highest morality because it demands the surrender of one's self. No other philosophy survives in her novels. The failure of conventional religion is seen in her works. The perverted relations serve as an
extension of the egoism, solipsism etc. and the alienated, neurotic, eccentric, perverted characters are the manifestations of modern existential man.

Thus, in the view of Murdoch morality is 'the vision of reality'. It involves respecting as far as possible the interests of other people. The attempt to attain this goal is an ego-shedding process which has to go on. This idea is significant in morality. The principles which lead any individual from this true vision of reality are the sin as understood from the fiction of Murdoch. It can be an emotion, behaviour, or action. But if it takes away the person from real 'love' and 'freedom' that would amount to a sin. In short, one can escape from the level of a sinner only when one is able to accept the otherness of the others around one, which is basically a religious idea.
Notes


3 Slaymaker 167.

4 Slaymaker 167.

5 Slaymaker 167.

6 Slaymaker, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," 426.

7 Slaymaker 425.

8 Slaymaker, "Myths ... in Murdoch's Fiction," 171.

9 Slaymaker 173.


14 Byatt, Iris Murdoch 18.

Qtd. in Scanlan 70.

Qtd. in Scanlan 70.

The Bible, The First Epistle of Peter 4:1, 12-17.


Byatt, Iris Murdoch 21.

Qtd. in Slaymaker, "Myths ... in Murdoch's Fiction," 167.


Qtd. in Slaymaker 168.


Qtd. in Culley 337.


Murdoch, The Bell 80.

Murdoch, The Bell 100.

Slaymaker, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," 428.


33 Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 38.

34 Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 123.


36 Murdoch, The Unicorn 118.

37 Qtd. in Margaret Scanlan 70.

38 Iris Murdoch, The Italian Girl (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979) 121.


41 Byatt, Iris Murdoch 23.

42 Byatt, Iris Murdoch 6.


46 Murdoch, The Time of the Angels 77.

47 Murdoch, The Time of the Angels 137.

48 Murdoch, The Time of the Angels 90.


50 Murdoch, The Nice and the Good 183.

51 Murdoch, The Nice and the Good 214.

52 Murdoch, The Nice and the Good 344.


55 The Bible, John 8:31-32.


65 Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* 208.


68 Zohreh T. Sullivan 558.