CHAPTER THREE

Theme of Moral Philosophy

Murdoch's work is so compelling and certain in conceptual analogy that moral philosophy finds expression in her novels in a deliberate style. She is an intensely conscious writer, and has continually emphasized the degree to which her novels are crafted and skillfully delineated. The relation between moral philosophy and narrative fiction is an intimate one. Both genres are concerned with motives and imaginings, with vicissitudes of passion. Very few noted philosophers attempted fiction, and Iris Murdoch was one of the eminent novelists to publish serious works of moral philosophy.

Murdoch started to publish theoretical text before fictional ones, therefore it is important to begin by giving her account of linguistic analysis and existentialism both of which she was initially attracted to but which she rejected in favour of a Weilian\(^1\) position. Her simultaneous rejection of linguistic analysis and existentialism has been shown in her essays like, The Existentialist Hero (1950), The Novelist as , Metaphysician (1950), Nostalgia for the Particular (1952), Vision and Choice in Morality (1956), and Metaphysics and Ethics (1957), as well as Sartre: Romantic Realist 1953.
According to Murdoch science cannot contain morality, as it cannot
deal with that, which is not accessible to empirical investigation, reason, or
logic, i.e. 'The inner life' such as thoughts and dreams. These 'mental events'
according to Murdoch are difficult to describe because of the nature of these
events and the nature of language. They emerge unexpectedly, and become
hazy or clear for no apparent reason. Murdoch argues:

the notion of privileged access to inner events has
been held morally suspect because among other
things, it would separate people from 'the ordinary
rational argument. But the unavoidable contextual
privacy of language already does this, and except at a
very simple and conventional level of communication
there is no such ordinary world.²

The novels of Murdoch seem to defend the inner life, its privacy,
subjectivity, non-availability to scientific enquiry, which she thinks to be the
basis of moral self. The concepts of these novels are against a view proposed
by linguistic analysis that reads morality in terms of overt, publicly available,
scientifically analyzable behavioral acts and utterances as they occur at a
given point in time.

Murdoch seems to reject linguistic analysis as considering philosophy a
science, it investigates morality in terms of linguistic and behavioral choice
rather than in terms of inner-life, Murdoch considers science (associated with
the symbolic, the masculine, that which form the methodological basis of linguistic analysis) subordinate to the art (associated with the semiotic, the feminine, her own ethics). In *Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch proclaims:

> It is totally misleading to speak, for instances, of 'two cultures'. One literary - humane and the other scientific, as if these two were of equal status. There is only one culture, of which science, so interesting and so dangerous; is now an important part. But the most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations. We are men and moral agents before we are scientists.³

Iris Murdoch is much in common with Sartre as she considers him great philosopher and is influenced by him. The books which can be consider in this particular category are *Under The Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter, The Bell, The Unicorn, The Time of the Anglels, The Black Prince, The Sea, the sea, The Philosopher's pupil, The Message to the Planet* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*. The themes and the treatment of these books are self consciously philosophical, in the strictest sense, and of interest to those with a philosophical bent rather than to ordinary man. Dave Gellman, Jake's book, Hugo's ideas, Anna's theory of art in *Under the Net*, Max Lejour, Danis's expository Christianity, and Hunnah's fumbling explanations of her behaviour in *The Unicorn*, the conflict of Michael's
religious inclination in *The Bell*, immoral Misha Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, anti-religious concepts in *The Time of the Angels*, the problem of good and bad art in *The Black Prince*, the tempest of passions aroused by Charles in *The Sea, the Sea*, obsessive relationship in *The Philosopher’s Pupil*; these are philosophical quite purely as the concept to be studied.

Murdoch first novel *Under the Net* represents an image of the private will, of various private wills with a moral and philosophical significance. In this novel the net is not seen as something which is, initially at least a trap, through whose meshes one tries to escape, but as something thrown over truth, underneath which we must creep in order to get at the precise situation. Murdoch in *Under the Net* has shown that she is an extremely rapid, various and prolific writer. Through her novel she wants to convey the real and important problems and to make an effort to understand human ideas and situation and the way to tackle them.

*Under the Net* represents two quests shown by its hero or narrator Jake, that is for Hugo and that for Anna. At the end of the book, Jake, having found the lost both the objects of his search, has found out more about reality and about and his own relationship to them. In the end of the novel Jake comes to know much more about his own limitations and his own relationship to them. About the novel, A.S. Byatt writes:

*The novel could be described as a philosophical novel very precisely since there is clearly a very conscious*
attempt to pattern. The events in Jake's story in terms of ideas of freedom, of philosophical approaches to reality, to what we know and what we cannot know.⁴

The rejection of existentialism by Murdoch operates along somewhat different lines from that of linguistic analysis. Murdoch proclaims that existentialism provides us with an image of self in the modern world, a world without god is understood to be contingent. The self becomes the sole arbiter of value, competing against other selves and their values. All have to rely on their selves as sources of meaning as there is no external guarantor of the 'correctness' of anyone's position. Given this situation the individual may have two stances: courage and action or going into despair and inaction. If he chooses the former he will find himself engaged in constant battle with otherselves who also want to assert their value; choosing the latter will leave him in a state of agony and frustration.

The idea of power and surrender in philosophical sense can be seen in the unifying framework of the novel The Flight from the Enchanter. The mythical framework is clear; around the figure of Mischa Fox, wielding power, cluster all the other characters, who are to varying degrees wielders or victims of power themselves (except Annette, who evades it, and Peter Seward who is outside it). The novel explains a planning, the deliberate arrangement and the discovery of it in a large part of aesthetic pleasure. The first study of the novel may irritate or bewildered the reader because of its speed at which it moved. The novel can indeed be called fantasy myth, a powerful and bitterly
amusing social myth of modern-times, containing its own historical terms and psychological explanations of human cruelty misunderstanding and social insecurity, therefore, the novel most probably be called a complete and amusing and moving meditation on modern freedom & slavery.

_Under the Net_ is a philosophical myth dealing with the question, how do we experience reality, or what is real in our experience? The characters are grouped round this; Hugo with his simple nostalgia for the particular; Dave is concerned with his logical analysis of words and rigid moral philosophy; Lefty with his subjection of everything to political expediency; Mars, represents animal vitality, Anna conveys the experience of reality through pure or impure art; Sammy who wields money, Sadie whose aim is to use other people, the contrasted worlds of business and art, silence and speech, isolation and society: all of these are patterned, introduced, reflected upon, and used in the story almost as dream allegory would use them.

Such conditions create a danger therefore the individual will cope with his understanding of world as contingent by indulging in a consoling self deception, as in the case of Jake and Misha fox. Such self-deception will fulfill their yearning for logical necessity in the order of the world; this self-deception constitutes what Sartre calls – "mauvaise foi". According to Murdoch, in Sartre's representation of the world, value - including moral value - is created through a process that starts with reflection followed by choosing an action; it is through the choices the individual makes that he confers meaning on the world around him. _Under the Net_ and _The Flight from the Enchanter_ both
are philosophical fables, using a proliferation of characters and dramatic incidents, farcical or tragic to convey the central theme. In *Under the Net* the theme is concerned with necessity and danger of concepts, forms in thought and action, in the worlds of art, of politics, or work of morals and of love. The social theme has been concerned in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the novel concerns the proper and improper use of power, personal and public, playing comic and bitter games with various forms of enslavement and emancipation, sexual, financial, bureaucratic and military. Murdoch does not agree to the 'imaginative solipsism' of Sartre's individual, which she describes as a function of the alienation of the self from his environment. She has criticized Sartre's inability to see emotion as a creative force and his view of the imagination as a tool of self-deception or *mauvaise foi*. But these two novels are close to Murdoch's work on Sartre, in the sense that, lightly but profoundly, they take up the Sartrean issue the relationship of the individual, and of art to political structure and ideals. The central figure of both novels, Jake and Rosa Keepe are Sartrean in the sense that they move through a society, which find unreal and alien but without the consolation of a rational universe. The virtue of these figures lies in understanding their own contingency and not in the contingency of the world.

We can say that these novels ask Sartrean questions but do not offer Sartrean answer. Sartre's hero agonizes and contemplates in a lucidly tortured solitude. These first two fantasies of Murdoch are a kind of meaningful game with Sartrean universe. Jake tries an internal monologue but
discovers that the world is full of other people whose views he has misinterpreted but can learn. Rosa is unable or fails to observe properly in individual life and needs of Nina, but they are there to be observed and Rosa can learn. There is no adequacy in any single view of the world or vision in a form of novel where everyone is always offering epigrammatic views on the nature of society or reality or suffering.

In her latter novels Murdoch rejects Sartre's philosophy as it results from its failure to express her experience of the world-her experience of it as a woman. She rejects existentialism as she defies a philosophy, which takes the male, and men's experience of the world, as norm. In *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, Murdoch accuses him of treating the novel as a "powerful weapon"¹⁶, using it as an "influential tool" to serve his "philosophical self-consciousness", thus "displaying to us - - - - - the structure of his own thought"¹⁶. Murdoch thinks it is not appropriate for a novelist to take interest in issues rather than in people. The division into writing novels and writing philosophy conveys the former to ordinary life, emotionality, mystification, pretence and nature, and the latter to the intellect, clarity, structure and unnaturalness. It also comes very close to ideas about gender divisions as projected perhaps most sharply in Victorian writings such as Ruskin's "Of Queens Gardens" where women and men are presented as inhabiting complementary spheres. Within these conventions of gender divisions philosophy would be associated with the masculine and the novel writing with the feminine. According to Murdoch philosophy and novel writing is
complementary but at the same time finds philosophy very alien. Philosophy Murdoch believes as a counter natural activity that goes against the bent of the human mind whereas art goes with the bent of human mind.

*The Sandcastle* conveys a basic human problem one of the problems of 'normal human inter course', it contains a problem, which is a 'real moral issue' and involves 'ordinary moral virtue' which Murdoch feels we neglect. Bledyard (an art teacher) in *The Sandcastle* has much in common with Hugo Belfounder. As an artist he has a belief that our vision of other human being is corrupted by our need to interpret them by what we are ourselves, and that to paint them at all is to lack reverence for God in them. He says:

*We cannot really observe really observe our betters.*

*Vices and peculiarities are easy to portray. But who can look reverently enough upon another human face? (T.S, p.78).*

Rain thinks of him, as Jake feels of Hugo, that what he utters is very abstract or important. *The Sandcastle* represents a theme also in the work of Simone Weil, who regards the imagination, to which, she usually refers as 'L' imagination, Combleuse de Vides', as something necessarily opposed to the spiritual path of self-effacement, acceptance of voids and acceptance of suffering. She regards the imagination as essentially something, which precludes an apprehension of reality in us. The apparently abstract quality of
Bledyards spirituality, which is similar to the reading to Simone Weil seems an inspiration for Murdoch's presentation of these characters.

Murdoch's next two novels *The Bell* and *An Unofficial Rose* are more successful and sustained attempts at showing efforts, failures, partial failures to apprehend the distinct being of other people, Murdoch in *The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited* present a very useful distinction between "convention", the force which derives *Ordinary Language Man*, and "neurosis" which derives *Totalitarian Man*. The moral decisions of the principal characters in *The Bell* and *An Unofficial Rose* have been dealt in a detailed description, it seems the effort, reasoned or instinctive, to understand and love, falling away constantly into one or the other. Randall the protagonist of *An Unofficial Rose* is most probably concerned with the state of neurosis. Randall leaves his wife in order to suffer enslavement at the hands of Lindsey Rimmer, while Lindsey herself, an earthly Venus, not a heavenly one, is the slave of Emma Sands who writes detective stories with structured plots, and whom Randall's father, Hugh, rejected, for no clear reason, in order to stay with his wife. Randall leaves the natural roses to be 'a writer', for form-and ends up living off his father's sale of the Tintoretto painting in an empty freedom designed, he suspects as part of Emma vengeance. In *An Unofficial Rose* convention drives, supremely Randall's wife, Ann, the 'Unofficial rose' of the title, who is in love with Felix, a soldier and a gentleman, and also held by convention.
Randall is a self-centred character, to whom other people are organised menacing extensions of the consciousness of the subject according to Murdoch this does not lead to great art. Randall is too rapacious to be a great artist on the other hand the roses are concerned with Ann, whose capacity for always winning the local flower arrangement competitions is not irrelevant. Randall’s progress through the book is seen as a moral out burst, a gain of financial freedom and a subjection to an overpowering necessity. The novel reflects the importance of morals in the life of human beings, by leaving it a person can earn money but money does not achieve the power to buy spiritual goods. What Randall buys is Lindsay and to see what Lindsay is we should glance at chapter thirteen in which discussing morals, Randall say to Lindsay:

*I suppose we are rather unprincipled, aren’t we?’ we don’t live by abstract rules,’ said Lindsay. ‘But our acts have their places. They belong to us.’ ‘Their places in a pattern,’ said Randall. ‘Yes. In a form, our lives belong to us* (UR, p.123).

Randall’s ‘airy world of the imagination’ seems uncertain and dim it was the world ‘above the mass of morality’ becomes dark and contingent for him. At the moment when he realizes the actual situation on receiving his cheque from Hugh, he feels completely alone and desperate. The novel’s paramount concern is the unconscious state of its protagonist. One of the important moral conversations between Ann and Swann conveys this particular notion.
Swann, concerning the nature of the marriage bond tells Ann that she must continue to love Randall, 'that if you can love him now and keep him in your heart that will be a joy that is better than happiness', and when Ann says:

I don't know what I'm like anymore. I feel now I have lived all my life in a state of unconsciousness, he tells her explicitly, 'Being good is a state of unconsciousness' (UR, p. 274).

At the end of the novel Ann finds herself to a state of unconsciousness—a state not certainly morally preferable to love for Felix, to 'what was rational and beautiful and free,' (UR, p. 339) but a state to which 'her whole life had compelled her' (UR, p.333). There is a real uncertainty about Ann's final state that successfully echo the incompleteness, the lack of clarity, of understanding, of moral and spiritual certainty. The reality of Ann is directly opposed to the inward integration, which may be achieved only by decisive choice of oneself. If Ann is not free to know and love Felix, she is abundantly aware of the transcendence of reality.

The Bell is one of the most fantastic achievements of Murdoch. The novel successfully combines the complexity of theme and relation of characters to the central idea, with the straightforward natural emotion and the depth of life. Murdoch does not accept linguistic analysis as it reduces morality to those phenomena that can be empirically investigated and therefore ignores the inner life. This inner life has been continually discussed
and analysed in her novels. Murdoch does not accept existentialism as it a
male centered with of an inter subjective world which emphasizes action,
responsibility, free will, choice, agency of all which woman have shared in
only marginally, if at all. Murdoch's criticism is partly based on her assertion
that the individual, as 'obscure system of energy' need to be presented with
technique for exploring and controlling (his or her) own spiritual energy' in
which neither linguistic analysis nor existentialism provide.

*The Bell* represents the inner life of its characters in a very accurate
style. The novel is concerned with two important characters Michael and
Dora, the real and unexpected individuals. Michael is a type of ineffectual
homosexual idealist; schoolmaster cum priest, Murdoch has treated him
completely in a non-sentimental respect. The next character Dora Greenfield
is also delineated in the same way. She has been shown a life-loving girl, not
grown up and carelessly badly behaved. She, too, cannot be so easily
summered up, is treated with respect, variety of moods and her moments of self
consciousness are placed with her sudden moments of wisdom.

The spiritual life of Michael is deeply involved in his attempts to retreat
into contemplation of his homosexuality. Murdoch represents it to be seen in
part as the sublimation of homosexual impulses. Murdoch's repeated
depiction of Michael's attempts to pray, of his own analysis of the relation
between his sexual feelings and his religion, show more tolerance in her
sense of his actual experience.
Michael's moral predicament is too simple; his true association with reality is might best be depicted by an examination of the contrast between his moral views and those of Jame Tayper Pace. He can be placed as pious, self-righteous, bound by convention, lacking in vision and is treated by Murdoch with considerable respect. James, the younger son of an old military family has served in guard and possesses a deep and unquestioning spiritual life. He feels religious faith as an integral part of life and is deeply connected with all the rituals of living life. Therefore, his morality is the fruit of the roots of his religious faith. This morality is very akin to that of Kant, as Murdoch says –

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does\text{ not tell us to respect whole tangled-up historical individual, but to respect the universal reason in their breasts . . . . Freedom is our ability to rise out of history and grasp a universal idea of order which we then apply to the sensible world . . . . we are supposed to live by exceedingly simple and general rules . . . .}^
\]
\['\text{Always tell the truth, etc. with no place for the morally complicated or eccentric.}^{11}\]

The Bell represents Murdoch over-riding concern with the individual as a moral being and her belief that the individual's state of mind determines his or her perception of the world at large.

Murdoch's The Time of the Angels is about moral consequences of contemplating certain concepts. The novel most probably is called an anti-
religious idea. The concept is grimmer and larger than the earlier novels. The emphasis of the thought has changed from the process of ideas in the character's minds to the large and ritually significant actions. A.S. Byatt reflects her ideas about the theme of the novel:

The Time of the Angels is concerned with the unrealized implications, psychological, moral behavioural, of the concepts at work in the 'demy theologizing' of the church, and new 'death of God' theology . . . . Miss Murdoch's belief that a 'deepening and enriching of concepts' is possible and desirable may recognize the atmosphere of moral and intellectual panic confused, which persuades this novel.12

The central character of the story is a priest who proclaims that God is dead and that people have often uttered the words but no one has believed them. The most significant scene of the novel is the one in which he lays out for his brother (who is a part-time philosopher and writing a book, a 'morality without God') the intellectual structure of his despair. It was his belief that philosophers and theologians with or without God, have always suffered from a superficial optimism regarding this universe and human nature. Throughout the novel the atmosphere of moral and intellectual panic pervades with a frightening phenomenon. Murdoch's metaphysical view in 'On "God" and "Good" seems very similar to her hero's she said:
We require a realistic conception of natural psychology (about which almost all philosophers seems to me to have been too optimistic) and also an acceptance of the utter talk of finality in human life...

'All is vanity' is the beginning and the end of ethics. The only genuine way be good is to be good' for nothing in the midst of a scene where every 'natural' thing, including one's own mind is subject to chance, that is, to necessity.13

Carel Fisher, the protagonist of the novel presents us a realistic and detailed picture of fallen man, he proved that self-knowledge is thus impossible and claims 'all altruism only feeds the fat ego'. He believes that the infliction of pain and the use of power lead the human beings directly to be convinced of the existence of others. He conveys that Good in this world is inextricably involved in egocentric fantasy: power and chance and fear and real. Carel withdrew into himself due to the effect of contemplation of such idea, he is sexually involved with three women of his household: first is black Pattie, his 'slave', second, Muriel and third his niece Elizabeth. His concept of goodness, 'for nothing' becomes a reason to require Pattie to act the redeeming 'miracle' of continuing to love him after discovering his relations with Elizabeth.

Carel Fisher, the rector, appears to lack ordinary human identity; it may be said that he is just a voice and whenever he is present his person is
obscure. If we analyse the contradiction of his holy calling, Carel may be identified with darkness. He is a sort of mysterious and sinister figure that, though, is the central character of the novel, is extremely elusive. We cannot deny the aspect that, like Faustus, Carel has sold his soul to the devil. The reflection of Marlow's Faustus in the third chapter connects the two stories and already prepares the reader for Carel's death.

_The Time of the Angels_ may perhaps be seen as a dramatic presentation of some of Murdoch's ideas which later appeared in _The Sovereignty of Good_, particularly in the essay 'On "God" and "Good"', published in 1969. The main concept in Marcus's (Carel's brother) projected book _Morality in a World Without God_ has been constantly present in the novel itself. Marcus, like Murdoch is willing to dispense with God but he is made anxious by the thought of a system of a 'morality without God' (T.A., p.71) and this anxiety dominates the novel as an undercurrent. It disturbs pure pleasure at the novel's comedy and underlining reader's anxiety regarding its central moral concepts. The struggle of Marcus establishes _the idea of an Absolute in Moral_, however, the thread of his argument has become lost in his thoughtful anxiety about Carel and Elizabeth.

Murdoch's concern is with the self in relation; her novels are the portrayal of individual consciousness and its function in people as moral beings. This consciousness effects on their perception of reality, rather than the social and historical conditions in which the characters operate. Her next novel _The Nice and The Good_, is deeply concerned with concept of Good
and evil. The novel begins with the suicide of Radeechy, the perpetrator of necromantic rites. The investigation into the death of Radeechy exposes the evil of McGrath and provides full rein to Ducane's sensitive and rather esoteric goodness. The goodness embraces Mary, returns Kate to Octavian and makes the reader able to believe the ending of the novel that brings about the redemption of McGrath. The novel ends with a happy ending with Ducane restoring order to chaos, with wives and husbands being reunited and children meeting their fathers again. The novel conveys Murdoch concern with the presentation of the philosophic concept of Good and with the problem of morality of Good that can exist without belief in a God.

The novel portrays a very large, intricately interrelated cast of characters, and their struggle to distinguish the nice from the good. The novel is a combination of lightly fantastic narrative patterning and realistic moral analysis. The nice Kate's possess the power of mild possessiveness while Ducane's has much more dangerous power of the good. He is considered the most admired and genuinely helpful man, whose failures can cause real tragedy. The novel conveys one of Murdoch's great gifts as a realistic novelist, a gift for analyzing conscious thought in her characters as well as unconscious impulses and emotional states.

Murdoch's fiction is the medium of her overriding concern with the individual as a moral being and her belief that the individual state of mind determines his or her perception of the world at large. She proclaims that - the most important thing, which the novel can reveal is 'that other people exist'
because 'we judge the greatest novelists by the quality of their awareness of other' and 'the novel has got to face the special problem of the individual within the work.'

The turning of the attention outwards, away from the self, is something portrayed by Murdoch in her well-known novel Bruno’s Dream. The novel represents the unattached selfless woman Lisa who attends to others. Lisa most probably may be called a fictional version of Simone Weil this aspect represents that Murdoch was deeply influenced by her:

Lisa had made a very different start. She reads Greats at Oxford and got a first. She went to teach in a school in Yorkshire and joined the communist party (BD, p. 61).

..... When next heard of she had become a catholic and joined the order of the poor Clares .... and the Roman catholic Church and went to live in Paris .......
Lisa was graver, gaunter, darker than Diana ... She was nervy and reticent and silent and solitary though she some – times talked philosophy with Miles and was more ardent than he to complete the argument ...

(BD, p. 62).
Lisa, poor Lisa, had come to be an occupation... she had been long ago in Diana's childhood, when Lisa's idealism and lack of common sense had constantly landed her in scrapes which Diana had had to deal with. Diana was devoted to her sister and enjoyed both armoring and patronizing her, and had always been helped and supported by Lisa's return of unquestioning love (BD, p. 87).

We can see the parallels between Weil and Lisa's lives. Lisa's education, preoccupation with catholism and philosophy, the school teaching and voluntary work during the vacation, the illness and seeming dependence of Lisa on her sister Diana all make an easy comparison to Weil.

*Bruno's Dream* represents the dying consciousness of an old man and the plot is initiated by a desire for reconciliation. The novel is a record of Bruno's failures professionally and personally. Bruno alienated his son Miles when he came to know that his son married to an Indian girl Parvati. Parvati had been killed in an air crash. Bruno feels tormented by the mess in which his own marriage has ended, as his wife Janie discovered his affair with Maureen. Janie's subsequent death from cancer while still unreconciled to him. Therefore, both of them (Bruno and Miles) are infect linked by the problematic nature of the relationship between death and consolation, this relationship has exercized by Murdoch theoretically too.
It is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, and of painting to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation .... The great deaths of Literature are few, but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way in which art invigorates us by a just apposition, almost identification, of pointlessness and value.  

When Bruno lies on his deathbed, various images of his lifetime crowd his memory, through these subtle use of these memories, Murdoch projects a sense of regret and failure. The different stages of Bruno’s progress towards death are universal and detailed richness of the data conveys a clear picture of this old man’s past and his endurance of a desperate present. Therefore the theme and subject of the novel is a fine example of Murdoch’s deep and grave tone in a realistic manner. The contemplation of Bruno is obscured by guilty memory of his bad behaviour and failed relationships. The state of guilt remains throughout the novel. Bruno’s imperfect contemplation of his dying is very natural, and he often asks himself about dying, death has been shown step by step. After a bad dream, Bruno in his conversation with Nigel and the nurse, talks of the presence and withdrawal in his life of various ideas of God from his childhood and on. Bruno’s early perception of God was as a spider:

*Later it was different, it was when I first started to look at spiders. Do you know, Nigel, that there is a spider called amaurobius, which lives in a burrow and has*
its young in the late summer, and then it dies when the frost begin, and the young spiders live through the cold by eating their mother's dead body. One can't believe that's an accident. I don't know that I imagined God as having thought it all out, but somehow. He was connected with the pattern. He was the pattern; He was those spiders which I watched in the light of my electric torch on summer nights. There was a wonderfulness, a separateness, it was divine to see those spiders living their extraordinary lives (BD, p.95).

There is a continual diminution of the image of God- to a petty official, to a small, crazed, pitiable being in country churches, finally to 'nothing but an intellectual fiction, an old hypothesis, a piece of literature' (BD, p.96). Bruno's long conversation leads him to the knowledge that the divine lives, if at all, in the quotidian. At the moment of dying, he realizes his childhood identification of God with the beauty of the spiders was good and broods over his current stage when, no longer able to use that spider image.

The dying of Bruno represents contemplation on God, his power and superiority. The concept of death invokes the learning and reality of life it shows that death effects a measure of change and happiness. Bruno's Dream, published the year before The Sovereignty of Good, seems to reflect many of the ideas to be found in the last of the essays. The essay
deals with Suffering, Love and Death; the out come of Bruno's Dream seems
to illustrate Murdoch's thesis that Good is supreme over other concepts.

*The Black Prince* has been considered her finest work. As Loxias and
Bradley Pearson explain in their forwards and postscripts, art is one of the
rare venues that allows for the articulation of truth. Loxias says in the
conclusion of the novel 'that art tells the only truth that ultimately matters.' As
a follower of the ideas of Ploto, Iris Murdoch believes that the world of
everyday life is a world of illusions; behind which exists a world of truth that
contains ideal forms. When one is finally able to see the world of ideal forms,
one is glimpsing truth. In a realm with both illusory and true worlds, art holds a
special place, because through it an artist is able to bring viewers out of the
illusory plane and into the true one. Art serves as a fundamental philosophical
tool that can alert the world to higher meanings in life. Bradley Pearson's
struggle to write a deeply meaningful novel *The Black Princes* captures one
artists attempts to preserve a glimmer of truth for others.

*The Black Prince* has very large issues – The relationship between
love and death, between art and life, and between youth and age. Murdoch in
her philosophical work has several time uttered for the human tendency to
'deform' reality by visualizing it through egocentric fantasy. She is particularly
interested in psychological system, which is known as sadomasochism.
Murdoch thinks it a chief enemy to clarity of vision, whether in art or morals. A
masochistic interest in suffering is a secret form of egoism masked as self-
 denial. It can be seen in the case of Bradley Pearson whose own descriptions
of himself as a masochist are interesting and Arnold Baffin's condemnations of him as one, and Francis Marloe's psychological portrait of him, which is represented among the postscripts of the novel. Murdoch comments:

  the idea of suffering confines the mind and .... can masquerade as a purification. It is rarely this, for unless it is very intense indeed it is too interesting. Plato does not say that philosophy is the study of suffering, he says it is the study of death.\textsuperscript{16}

Thematically, \textit{The Black Prince} represents a remarkably brilliant self-imposed challenge it is undoubtedly the most solipsistic of Murdoch's novels. Bradley Pearson argues \textit{Hamlet} to be on Shakespeare's: 'Hamlet is a wild act of audacity a self-purging, a complete self-castigation in the presence of the god' (BP, p.200). \textit{The Black Prince}, who has been considered an object of love and terror is a composite god demon in the novel. He is Apollo, the god of light and art, but also the cruel god who punished the faun, Marsyas, by flaying him for daring to compete with him as an artist. Bradley's views on art and the relationship between art and morals resemble to Murdoch's views expressed in her philosophical essays:

  Art and morals are with certain provisos, one. Their essence is the same. The essence of them both is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the
extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.¹⁷

In *The Black Prince*, Murdoch seems to be agreed with Eliot's view that the true artist should be impersonal, emptied of self, and in this sense Bradley's silence', self-effacement in morals and writing, are related to the ideal of impersonality. Bradley's preoccupation with the selflessness of Shakespeare's vision is a fine example of this notion, which has been expressed by Iris Murdoch herself on other occasions. The later novels of Murdoch are remarkable for her use of Shakespearean plots and references as she is concerned to identify the difference between good and great art. Murdoch also sees him, with the great nineteenth – century novelists, as a high example of the realism, moral and aesthetic that she wants to achieve. *The Black Prince* may be said a complex artistic joke regarding the nature of *Hamlet* and *Hamlet's* relationship to its largely unknown and impersonal author. The moral and dramatic problems of the novel have been deeply conveyed through the crucial discussions about *Hamlet*, between Bradley and Julian Baffin.

Murdoch as a realistic novelist tried to imitate nature and hold the mirror up to the world and did those things, which are, infect so frightfully difficult to do, to create characters that are like real people. Murdoch in her novels does not refer photographic naturalism, she is, infect, not interested in material reality. Rather it has to do with a particular attitude that conveys a
non-sentimental, non-meanly – personal imaginative grasp of the subject matter, and as such with morality.

The reality Murdoch strives to represent is neither predominantly material or a social one. The reality Murdoch wants to investigate as interested in is her 'reality of persons'. This reality most probably is called, psychological reality, or the reality of the 'mental event', or the 'inner life'. Everything else is subordinate to that. This inner life is one which exists in the first instance specially and purely for the individual to whom it is directly accessible. 'Inner life' has an unconscious as well as a conscious component. It has to be remembered that for Murdoch fantasy is associated with the self. The term fantastic for Murdoch his not a symbol of supernatural events but this is concerned with inner life of the individual. Murdoch thinks that real people are more eccentric than anybody portrayed in novels. Human beings are very odd and very different from each other. Therefore she considers novel as a marvelous form in that real people have been shown with great skill to some extent of their fantasies.

Murdoch’s highly praised novel *The Sea, the Sea* is a brilliant example of the inner life, morality and philosophy concerned with its protagonist Charles Arrowby and his cousin James. Murdoch received Booker prize for her widely successful, realistic, archetypal or mystical novel with Buddhist over tone. The novel represents everything in the world: realism, symbolism, mythological dimensions, the idea of love in its betrayals or fulfillment, the views of freedom, transcendence, fantasy, illusion belief and the opposing
wills of others. Murdoch wanted to create in a wonderful magical way real characters, real independent people who would grow and be remembered as real individuals. Through this novel she represents the idea of 'a Shakespearean novel' to have an ability to create free people who are wandering round in a sort of open-air atmosphere.

The religious thoughts in *The Sea, the Sea* centres on James; though the discussion based on his Buddhist belief occupies only a few pages, the readers are throughout made aware of his essential goodness. James goodness is a sharp contrast to Charles apparent lack of understanding of moral concepts. Though James is not the principal protagonist in the novel but his influence upon Charles is profound. Charles comments: 'His importance lies entirely in my mind' (SS, p.57). Therefore, James becomes the focus for the moral and religious thought in the novel. The events of the novel suggest that Charles is a deeply frustrated man who has achieved worldly success at the expense of his spirit behind the guise of ruthless theatre director and of brash womanizer. it seems that there is a desolated soul, whose emotional life came to an end when his childhood sweetheart deserted him. The broken hearted lover is simply consoled by James, he reflects the emptiness of his (Charles) spiritual life; it is a story that he has invented to account for his life. As James explains:

*We live in dreams and by dreams, and even in a disciplined spiritual life ... It is hard to distinguish dream from reality. In ordinary human affairs humble*
common sense comes to one's aid. For most people common sense is moral sense .... Ask yourself, what really happened between whom all those years ago? you've made it into a story and stories are false.

(SS, p.335).

Early in the novel, Charles reviews his acting and directing career similar to Prospero. Murdoch intends the reader to carry the analogy through. Charles isolation in his house beside the sea may be compare to the ageing Prospero's isolation on his magic island. Charles too embarks on the tale of his past life through at greater length and to the reader as audience. Still he thinks his isolation is incomplete, for, far more quickly than in Prospero's case in The Tempest. He claims that 'there has been a moral change in him' (SS, p.3). The 'magic' of Charles is not mystical, it has been performed to gain admiration and praise and to ensure women whom he has used for his own end. James, however may be seen as in some ways playing Ariel to Charles's Prospero, finding 'his ways across country like a fox', discovering lost playthings and even 'seriously attempting to learn fly' (SS, p.63). He plays instrumental role in returning Hartley to her husband. It is James who miraculously saves Charles's life and finally disappears in a liberating death James is not just a miracle monger, a performer of spectacular feats but rather a religious mystic, in the series of magicians and enchanters in Murdoch's novels.
Murdoch's novels from *The Sea the Sea* to *The Message to the Planet*, are deeply philosophical, deeply religious, full of mysticism and imbued with the mystery of personality to a much greater extent than earlier novels. *The Sea, the Sea* has been discussed then comes *Nuns and Soldiers* in which Christianity is again put under the microscope when Anne Cavidge contemplates her (unexpected) conversion to catholicism and her subsequent rejection of convent life. *Nuns and Soldiers* represents the idea of lost faith in God, Ann Cavidge who has given up being a nun as she lost her faith in God, has the most direct and startling experience of Christ. Anne is visited by Christ in her kitchen and told 'almost carelessly' that there is salvation, but she must do it all herself. Christ also tells her that he is not a magician and she knows what to do. He advises her to do right and refrain from wrong. A.S. Byatt comment:

*This Christ is very real and some what inconsequential; interestingly, he shares with all Miss Murdoch's 'good' people a blanched look: 'He had a strangely elongated and a strong pallor, a pallor of something which had long been deprived of light, a shadowed leaf, a deep sea fish, a grub inside a fruit'*

Murdoch thoughts of Christianity, with what she visualize a contemporary need for a religion, albeit a religion without a God, as a new Christianity focusing on the acceptance of a mythical Christ who is goodness or the good man. The most important change that she experienced during the
twentieth century is the disappearance of religion. Murdoch believed that in England the demythologizing of religion, the new consideration of dogmas as myth could bring religion back in the society. Such revitalized, demythologized religion is central in her later novels.

Murdoch’s next novel *The Philosopher’s Pupil* follows to some extent the same notion, Father Bernard like others of Murdoch’s religious figure is able to reject God but clings to the idea of Christ as ‘a mystical figure’ (PP, p.156). It is novel explicit in its deployment of recurrent Murdoch types and situations, although in discussion of it she has denied both that she made philosophy its subject in order to express any of her own philosophical viewpoints or theories, and that she intended to set philosophy in opposition to art in it. She prefers to see Rozanov’s profession in the novel as consistent with a certain moral absoluteness. This absoluteness leads to uncompromising and even absurd behaviour in relation to other human beings.

*The Good Apprentice* looks at the possibility of a religion without God; Stuart Cuno is obsessed with the idea of a religion based on goodness, and on spirituality without God or the supernatural belief that accompany Christianity. *The Good Apprentice* focuses itself with intricate relationship, for Edward Baltram has more than his fair share of relations and half relations, with two mothers, two fathers, a half brother who is not a brother at all, a half-sister and another half sister who is probably not a sister at all. There is Harry Cuno who is Edward’s stepfather and is in the middle of an affair with Midge’s,
the sister of his dead wife. The novel represents Edward's desire to reclaim his true father and consequently to find himself that the novel is focused.

The element of ambiguity can be seen throughout the novel, for we come to realize that Edward Baltram, the eponymous hero, is not a good apprenticeship to become good. The beginning of the novel reflects the initial lack of goodness in Edward, for it begins by equating him with the biblical prodigal son and it proceeds to describe how he has 'sinned against heaven and before [his father]' (GA, p. 1) by duping his best friend, Mark Wilsden, into eating a drugged sandwich and then leaving him alone. Mark experiences a euphoric 'trip' in which he falls out of the window of Edward's second-floor flat. Sarah Plowmain, a fellow student, is seducing Edward. Here we may see Edward's desperate feelings of guilt as a sign that he is essentially 'good', the novel charts Edward's journey towards repentance, atonement, redemption and the completion of his apprenticeship.

The main cause of Edwards's depression following Mark's death is the beginning of the dialogue about Good and Evil in the novel. He feels the burden of sin upon him. 'How does one live', he ponders, 'after total wickedness, total failure, total disgrace? ........... Like Cain I have killed my brother whom I loved' (GA, p. 10 and 12). Edward's depressive illness is partly replicated in half-brother, Stuart Cuno, who has renounced the world of science and mathematics in which he excelled, and is suffering, according to his relations and friends, from 'a temporary fit of religious mania' (GA, p. 34). He has abandoned his academic studies, bound himself to celibacy and is
seeking a way of life that will not conflict with his new-found principles; for Stuart, the answer to the world's problem is 'goodness ..... some sort of spiritual ideal and discipline ..... religion without God' (GA, p.31). Both of the brothers represent the theme of religion, the one by expressing a burden of guilt, the other with a burden of unfulfilled longing and seeking for some spiritual solution to their problems.

Edward is troubled as he rejects the possibility of consolation and thus of forgiveness: 'There's no morality', he asserts (GA, p.45) and this belief leaves him without hope, for if there is no morality he did nothing wrong and his guilt has no point; thus there is no way in which expiation can be achieved for there is nothing to expiate. This terrible sense of emptiness, of nothingness, invokes him to overcome in his apprenticeship to Good. Despite their renunciation of God, there is a curiously religious tone to the struggle of the two brothers. Stuart recommends Edward to try praying, if it is only to ask to be delivered from evil; he commends Christ to him, and offers him a bible. Edward, for his part, after initially throwing the Bible across the room, momentarily distracts himself by opening it at random to see if it can offer him a message. Indeed, it does, for his finger lights on a verse from Ezekiel 7.25, 'Destruction Cometh, and they shall seek peace and there shall be none ....'. It is a peace, which Edward has been seeking but seems unable to find and which in the sors appears to be withheld from him. Stuart has been delineated as a kind of saint; he is at the center of most of the discussions about religion and about Good that are to be found in the novel. His thoughts are directed
towards leading a life of purity, to subduing self and all selfish desire dedicating himself to the service of others.

Murdoch's next two novels, *The Book and the Brotherhood* and *The Message to the Planet* are novels that particularly deal with an enchanter figure. These two novels convey the conflicting aspect of human nature, they are also comic, ramshackle, patched together and surprising in this coincidental pleasures and little magic coincidences. Neither David Crimond of *The Book and the Brotherhood*, nor Marcus Valler of *The Message to the Planet* are very likeable characters but both act as magnets to most of the other people in the two novels.

Both David and Marcus have been shown actively searching for some solution to mankind's problem – or is it that men and women so much believe in the possibility of the alleviation of the human condition that they create their own god. *The Book and the Brotherhood* and *The Message to the Planet* are not so successful as *The Good Apprentice*, partly because the center of magnetism, the enchanters David and Marcus as they never becomes fully integrated into the world of the novel itself. David's intellectual hold on the minds of his Oxford friends, who at first against the odds, persist in believing in and supporting the writing of his *magnum opus*, the great seminal neo-Marxist book, is not quite credible; this is particularly so in view of the violence and malice of his behaviour towards Duncan Cambus and of his total lack of interest in any of them except Jean Cambus. *The Message to the Planet* centers on the philosopher Marcus Valler who is searching for a formula,
which will explain life, but if he finds it before his death, he takes it with him to his grave. In these novels Murdoch is concerned with ideas such as 'good for nothingness' and selflessness that is prominent in most of her novels.

Murdoch takes the moral life more seriously than almost any other well-known contemporary novelist, and, moreover, that the virtues and shortcomings of her work are tightly interwoven. Her insistence that a good life is possible, and that many people actively pursue it, including those who don't know what they are doing so, mark a fresh and exciting alternative to the more common themes of today's 'serious' fiction. In order to make the pursuit of goodness seem both attractive and possible, Murdoch tends to avoid raising hard questions about those who quite evidently are not interested in goodness, or those who fight with little success against their evil impulses.

Murdoch's latest novel *The Green Night* explores the moral theme in various ways. Bellamy James is the main seeker after God, his whole life 'a religious quest' (GK, p.23), which his conversion to Roman Catholicism has not resolved. Like Catherine Fawley in *The Bell* he decides to give up the world and enter a monastery in an enclosed order, to cut himself off from social life and dedicate himself to truth, much of the serious religious discussion in the novel is to be found in the exchange of letters between Bellamy and his mentor, Father Damien, whose philosophy seems in many ways to accord with that of Murdoch's herself.
Bellamy has romanticized the religious life, that the monastery is to be for him an escape from reality. He is playing a Christian role to disguise from himself the very fact that he has not convinced himself of Christ's existence, first in the flesh and then in the spirit:

\[
\text{if we have a mystical Christ can that be the real Christ? Is a mystical Christ "Good enough"? Could there be Christ if that man never existed at all?} \]

(GK, p.41).

Here Bellamy is researching on one of Murdoch's own worries:

\[
\text{Perhaps (I believe) Christianity can continue without a personal God, or a risen Christ, without beliefs in supernatural places and happenings, such as heaven and life after that, but retaining the mystical figure of Christ occupying a place analogous to that of Buddha: a Christ who can console and save, but who is to be found as a living force within each human soul and not in some supernatural elsewhere.}
\]

Though Bellamy has lost his vision of a personal God he has not lost his desire to have an 'avatar' or a 'mediator' whom he can venerate. He is a man for whom religion is necessity that has often been called "ethical Christianity". Murdoch repeatedly insists that morality, as commonly
conceived, is not self-supporting. She argues, morality itself must be
grounded in religious commitment. Religion, as Murdoch defines it, demands
more of us than any mere morality can; it requires our unswerving allegiance,
its claims upon us are absolute. In this sense, while the desire to be good or
to be a better person may be a merely moral project, the pursuit of the God is
genuinely religious. The true encounter with Christ (or Buddha, or whomever)
will be a mystical vision of the Good that shines through him, not a simple
acknowledgement of his ethical superiority and the value of following his
example.
References

(1) It is referred to Simone Weil the French philosopher.


(3) Ibid, p.34


(6) Ibid, p.17.

(7) Ordinary language man is shaped by convention but is too arrogant to be overpowered by any structure larger than himself.

The second condition – neurosis – is the most telling mark of the existential man, who Murdoch calls the totalitarian man because of his supreme isolation.

This concept has been obliterated in The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited, Yale Review 49 winter, 1960.


(16) Iris Murdoch, "On" "God" and "Good", in The Sovereignty of God, New York: Schocken, 1971, p.68

