Chapter Two

Ordinary Language Man Vs. Totalitarian Man

Iris Murdoch, a moral philosopher and novelist is concerned with the predicament of modern man. Her novels are enriched with philosophical ideas. Nicol comments, “Murdoch’s philosophy precedes her fiction in an even more deep-rooted sense, in that the organization, characterization, and plot of her novels are governed by her philosophy and literary theory” (597). The philosophical ideas expressed through her novels show that she is influenced by great philosophers like Sartre and Simone Weil. For Murdoch, modern man is interested only in his own affairs. Her novels focus that humanity can be saved from meeting a tragic end only through goodness and love. Her novels, like her philosophical works present her perennial preoccupation with goodness and also deal with what makes people good and evil. Murdoch’s philosophical works deal largely with the relations between art and morals. They also attempt “to distinguish truth from fantasy, particularly in the presentation of a sufficiently complex image of the human personality” (Byatt 6). Her novels reveal a dark picture of human reality. Through her works, she points out that leading a good life is impossible for the illusion - ridden egotistical characters.

Murdoch, a writer of the second half of the twentieth century has influenced her readers through her moral philosophy. Her philosophy is very different from the philosophy of the majority of her contemporaries. For Murdoch, the modern philosophy has become reductionist, and produces only an unrealistic picture of the human being.
Levenson opines, one of Murdoch’s literary gifts is “the ability to offer terse, descriptive accounts of the failing philosophic and cultural designs that she sees everywhere around her” (569). It fails to account for the varied experiences which constitute the reality of human life and so Murdoch’s novels reflect the inner self of the human beings. Her novels also attempt to describe the wide gamut of human life. She does not move towards science but embraces religion and art, considering that any true account of human being must include the artistic imagination and spirituality. She intends to broaden the modern philosophical framework so that it includes non-scientific concepts. This kind of philosophy “will reestablish the individual and check the increasing power of science” (Sovereignty 76). Murdoch’s wish is that philosophy should once again present a picture of the whole of human life and provide succour and insight to all.

Murdoch’s leading philosophical concerns do not share the attributes of contemporary philosophy. For Murdoch, the two schools of philosophy namely Linguistic Analysis and Existentialism not only lead to the void of moral referents but also to the formation of an image of man as a “brave naked will” (“Dryness” 17), surrounded by an easily comprehensible empirical world. Her own philosophical position emerges out of the objections she raises against this facile picture. According to Murdoch, “the one-dimensional, over simplified and arid image of the human person is compounded of a materialistic behaviourism with a dramatic view of the individual as a solitary will” (18).

Murdoch’s focus on the good life and her interest in religion and art mark her out as very different from other philosophers. The individual, the self and the inner life are all concepts which are fundamental to Murdoch’s philosophy. She considers philosophy “as
a counter natural activity that goes against the bent of the human mind, whereas art goes
with the bent of the human mind” (qtd. in Panwar 5). Her aim is not to question the
details of the philosophy of her contemporaries, but to change the outlook of philosophy
and its entirety. Kerr comments, Murdoch’s philosophy opens up “a way of conceiving
ourselves as infinite beings, who are nevertheless capable of a certain self-transcendence
which fulfills and does not negate our humanity” (qtd. in Widdows 28). Thus Murdoch
attempts to produce, “if not a comprehensive analysis, at least a rival soul-picture which
covers a greater or different territory should make new places for philosophical
reflection” (Sovereignty 2).

Murdoch views a man’s relationship with other people and his environment as
perpetually shifting, significant and valuable. She often suggests that man must nurture a
respect for contingency. Contingency is another essential and recurrent word in
Murdoch’s philosophical essays and novels. It is used to describe, “what is random,
accidental, simply factual, about things and people- what is both immediate, and not part
of any formal plan or pattern” (Byatt 11). Murdoch presents contingency as being
independent of man’s will or conscious decisions. Her characters are constantly placed
before difficult moral dilemmas, and they interact with other characters and the
contingent world around them. In this respect they must make their moral decisions in
terms of how they see the situations, people and things with their own feeling of
consolation.

Murdoch sees the twentieth century individual’s dilemma as one in which there is
“far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality” (“Dryness” 17). This dilemma
is due to the fact that modern man has lost his moral referents as a result of confronting
and being over-awed by logical positivism, determinism, behaviourism and utilitarianism. Due to this, he has come to believe that reality is merely a quantity of material atoms. He is reduced to a hollow man with no meaning or essence in his life. Murdoch seems determined to expose the prevailing confusion and falsehood and also desires to afford a solution. Her impression of man in contemporary society can be compared with Simone Weil’s image of the directionless traveller. Murdoch derives most of her ideas from the writings of Weil. For Murdoch, man can overcome this state of being and gain a sense of direction by ridding himself of “the fat relentless ego” (Sovereignty 52).

The main hindrance to clear-sightedness is the self. Egoism is a certain pattern of behaviour in which one always acts in such a way to make the pursuit of one’s own interests. Freud considers the ego as “standing behind the various activities of consciousness and thus what one directly perceives is interpreted as material for the ego, rather than as an object having a character in its own right” (23). Murdoch shows ego as a falsifying veil which serves to hide the external world from the viewer. Reluctant to face unpleasant realities the human psyche is thus tempted “to move about in a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect from pain” (Sovereignty 79). Murdoch interprets Freud’s perception of human nature as follows:

He sees the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control. Introspection reveals only the deep tissue of ambivalent motive, and fantasy is a stronger force than reason. Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings. (50)
To Murdoch, selfishness is a vice, and unselfishness a virtue.

The concept of attention is clearly related to Murdoch’s concept of good and goodness. She borrows the concept of ‘attention’ from Simone Weil, who considers attention as a disciplined will accomplishing a task unhampered by distraction or dreaming. For Murdoch, man must truly make an effort to see the world around him. Thus attention requires man to gather consciousness and focuses honestly on outside circumstances. It is an attempt to open the spirit to receive justly the impingements of other people and situations. It also brings moral change and reduction of egoism through an increased awareness of the reality of other people and things. Murdoch thus endorses Weil’s view that if one attends properly to life, he/she can make moral decisions based on his/her attention.

Murdoch connects ‘attention’ to Kant’s concept of ‘achtung’ which means a respect for moral law. It is a type of suffering pride that accompanies the recognition of duty. The freedom inspired by Kant is an “aspiration to a universal order consisting of prefabricated harmony” (Datta15). Kant’s concept of freedom is not the tragic freedom upheld by Murdoch. The tragic quality of Murdochian freedom is linked with love. She views:

The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others . . . . Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other, in the context of infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding, of two irreducibly
dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness. (“Sublime” 52)

It is a moral labour to realize the independence of things outside ourselves. Moral endeavour involves a willed selflessness, which aims at knowledge of an individual’s realities. This ability to direct attention is love.

Murdochian philosophy revolves around two important elements, they are selflessness and love. Obedience to reality, for Murdoch, is an exercise of love. Love is defined by Murdoch as “a knowledge of the individual” (Sovereignty 28). Love is considered to be an important factor in the moral life. Human love “is normally too profoundly possessive and also too mechanical to be a place of vision” (73). She differentiates between the real and the false love, the first being selfless and other-directed, and the second is selfish and possessive. Both Platonic and Courtly love are romantic as the person who is loved is endowed with an imaginary personality. Murdoch recognizes the importance of disciplined love, which helps to see the world and the people as they are. It harbours no intention of dominating or appropriating the other to the predatory organism of the self.

It is in Murdoch’s conception of the good that her ideas are brought to a focus. Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, “to see and respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (93). If one starts to lead a good life, one can perceive reality in its infinite variety. It is through love one can attain increasing awareness of the good. Weil also expresses a similar idea:
To empty ourselves of our false divinity, to deny ourselves, to give up being the centre of the world in imagination, to discern that all points in the world are equally centers and that the true centre is outside the world, [this is an act of consent to reality, and] such consent is love. (471)

Murdoch associates virtue with freedom and knowledge. The magnetic centre towards which love moves is virtue. Datta identifies that Murdoch’s conception of the good “involves the difficult task of understanding the inexhaustible, mysterious reality and therefore shares its indefinable and elusive quality” (18).

Murdoch’s concept of freedom is integrated with her moral philosophy. While restoring vision as morally central, she gives a different and lesser place to human freedom. She agrees with Weil that “will is obedience not resolution” (Sovereignty 39). Freedom offers emancipation from fantasy and leads to the experience of accurate vision. Thus the Murdochian concept of freedom is linked with virtue, love, attention and realism. It demands objectivity and a process of unselfing. It also urges a leaping out of one’s normally predatory egos. In the Murdochian sense, man is not absolutely free because the work of attention determining his freedom is a continual, difficult and unconscious process.

In Murdoch’s opinion modern consciousness is trapped between convention and neurosis. The contemporary novel has become the expression of both these consciousness. The fictional modes embodying these two tendencies are described as journalistic and crystalline. The crystalline is a novel of dry aesthetic concentration and deals with form rather than portraying the complex, varied aspects of reality and
experience. Murdoch describes it as “a small quasi allegorical object portraying a human condition” (“Dryness” 18). It is the story of a lonely and brave ‘Totalitarian Man.’ Its chief concern lies not in characterization but in general human truths. In these novels, man is seen as completely alone, alienated from his social environment. He mistrusts his inner life and finds it insubstantial. He dramatizes his situation into a myth.

The journalistic novel is a novel of accumulated facts and information. It is “a large shapeless quasi documentary object, the degenerate descendent of the nineteenth century novel, telling with pale conventional characters some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts” (18). Murdoch associates ‘Ordinary Language Man’ or conventional man with journalistic novels. In these novels man is seen in his social aspect only, not as an individual who is contingent. They are highly conventional in character.

The complex web of emotions and actions of the characters are revealed through the famous Murdochian classification of the ‘Ordinary Language Man’ and the ‘Totalitarian Man.’ The first group consists of the conventional or good characters. The rapacious or the violent characters belong to the second group representing neurosis. Murdoch regards, philosophy as “the mirror and guide of the age” (“Existentialists” 172). She describes the ‘Ordinary Language Man’ as the representative of Linguistic Analysis and the ‘Totalitarian Man’ is described as the representative of the Existentialist philosophy, particularly that of French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre.

The conventional character is not overwhelmed by any structure larger than himself, he is “too abstract, too conventional, he incarnates the commonest and vaguest
network of conventional moral thought” (“Sublime Revisited” 255). He is conventional, behaviouristic and liberal. As he is surrounded by conventional rules of ordinary language, his personality represents a surrender to convention. On the other hand, the Totalitarian man is described as the solitary “monarch of all he surreys and totally responsible for all his actions. Nothing transcends him” (“Dryness” 17). This man feels anguish in the face of an absurd or hostile universe. He is like a neurotic who tries to cure himself by unfolding a myth about himself. In his solipsism, he is too concrete and too neurotic and Murdoch calls this concept neurosis.

Murdoch’s own philosophical stance is against some views of Sartre’s. Existentialism is directed towards the reaffirmation of the free individual and his authentic concerns. Sartre’s approach to existentialism emphasizes the fundamental elements of human freedom. He takes an activist position with regard to freedom. He believes that freedom must be dealt with and accepted. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre states, “freedom is nothing but the existence of our will or of our passions in so far as this existence is the nihilation of facticity; that is, the existence of a being which is its being in the mode of having to be it” (573). He accepts Nietzsche’s announcement that god is dead and man is absolutely free and responsible for his destiny. In Existentialism and Humanism, Sartre declares:

. . . there is no God and therefore human beings are neither created nor pervaded by anyone or anything that can have a plan or idea of what they will be like before they come into existence or before they develop by their own free action. This is to say that ‘existence comes before essence’.

(26)
Hence, due to the absence of God, man is the creator of his own scale of values. The essence of his being lies not in the structures of the past but in his freedom to make choices for his life.

Like Sartre and Freud, Murdoch considers life as an egocentric drama. For them, man is still at the stage of thinking perpetually of himself. Murdoch too identifies that because of this, a man cannot love anyone outside himself. For the Sartrean man, love is an assertion of self. It is a demand by one to be adored by the other. Murdoch in her *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* explains this concept of love as unrealistic and compares it with a “battle between two hypnotists in a closed room” (96). She is concerned with how men handle their lives, and how they live out their relationships with others. Murdoch views that the most difficult and important part of a man’s life is the relationship between himself and others. Man must recognize the reality of others. Lack of attention may result in fantasy, a degraded use of the imagination.

Murdoch asserts that much of the problem with the linguistic ideal lies in the human creation of the ‘Ordinary Language Man,’ whom she defines “a study of ‘Ordinary language’ claimed (often rightly) to solve piecemeal problems in epistemology which had formerly been discussed in terms of the activities or faculties of a self” (*Sovereignty* 47). Few characters in Murdoch’s novels are caught in the trap of using conventional, self-absorbed types of language to explain the totality of existence. According to Tucker:

Convention is the dominant landscape of what Murdoch calls the Ordinary Language Man- so called because he is shaped by convention but is too
arrogant to be overpowered by any structure larger than himself. He has a
tendency toward abstraction and oversimplification, and although he exists
in a network of difference, he still manages to operate self-sufficiently. (3)

Thus convention is showing undue weight to external reality. These characters are bound
to rules and conventions. The tendency to be conventional is as harmful as neurosis. The
conventional characters get trapped in conventions and try to direct their lives according
to rules to lead an orderly life.

Convention implies set behaviours, prescribed routines, and safe habitual actions
which in their lack of exertion and spontaneity spoil both perceptions and feelings. These
are chains which bind one to custom. The good characters do not try to break these chains
because in their familiarity they have grown comfortable, and even safe. Murdoch’s
fiction “is full of characters who find safety in convention, who achieve easy success in
the routines of public and professional life, but who lead unutterably dull, because
uninvolved, existences” (Jacobs 43). She enjoys playing the witch with these characters,
throwing unexpectedly genuine, often sexual, human contact in the way of their too
habitual paths, forcing their arousal from this sleep-like life.

Murdoch makes her readers realize that goodness is considered as a negative
virtue which is rarely rewarded in the present materialistic world. Her treatment differs
from the treatment given to the good characters by most novelists. Writers like
Richardson, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope and Mrs. Gaskell try to make their
good characters appear tragic and these writers intentionally arouse the readers to
sympathize for the good ones. Unlike these novelists, Murdoch shows the ups and downs
in the lives of her good characters. She presents some conventional characters and their relationships with others in her novels. They are good characters, having fixed ideas. As they surrender themselves to conventions, they fail to perceive reality. Her good characters face failure and have a tragic end in worldly affairs, because they are sensitive and not materialistic in their attitude towards life. They believe in a gospel of love and sacrifice and are seldom rewarded for their goodness.

Murdoch does not discuss goodness in her philosophical writings but dramatizes her concept of goodness through her characters. Goodness can be found in simple and innocent people. They are self-sacrificing, and devote their energies to the welfare of others. They possess the quality of renunciation and tolerance. They often fall into the trap of the evil designs of selfish and materialistic people. The moral values of a person can be understood only if he or she comes in contact with other human beings. Murdoch expresses, goodness cannot exist in a vacuum. The good characters recognize the claims of others on themselves. They are always aware of the needs of the people surrounding them.

Murdoch portrays Hugo in *Under the Net* as a character in possession of higher moral faculties. He lives by a constant sacrifice of the will. He refuses to theorize and pays a spontaneous and natural attention to even the minutest details of the world. He is a character of unconscious goodness. His lack of interest in selfish pursuits makes him rise above the moral level of other characters. He does not exploit the vices of others for his own benefit. Like a lot of people, he too is a victim of fate. His lack of greed and malice make him an innocent person. He is in fact like a child in his ingenious attitude towards
the world. For him, “each thing was astonishing, delightful, complicated and mysterious” (Net 66).

Of all characters, Hugo is closest to the truth because he lacks self-image. He respects contingency. He has no desire to make life into a pattern and accepts the contingent elements of life. He is a socialist and an ardent pacifist. Due to his concern for humanity, he converts his well established form of weapons to a firm of fireworks. His philosophy of life is revealed in the description of his queer fascination for fireworks. He says, “you pay your money . . . and you get an absolutely momentary pleasure with no nonsense about it. No one talks cant about fireworks” (61). This philosophical view of the world as nothing more than a passing shadow has generated in him an attitude of indifference to his own material interests. It is this attitude which takes him to the Cold Cure Research Centre to be used as guinea pig. He allows his body to be used for experimenting new medicines for better health of humanity in general.

Besides selflessness, Hugo possesses tolerance and patience. At the Cold Cure Research Centre, unlike Jake he offers his services without any charges. At the same time, he does not feel any sort of superiority over Jake. At the centre, when he goes to share a room with Jake, he is not welcomed by the latter. In spite of being a very rich man, he tolerates the indignities of a pauper like Jake. Jake says, “he had been introduced to me when he arrived, but I paid no attention then” (63). He does not utter a single word till Jake himself starts talking to him. Once the contact is established, Jake realizes Hugo’s greatness. Jake considers Hugo as his spiritual guide. Their conversation helps Jake to perceive the whole world in a new light. Profoundly impressed by Hugo, Jake tries to place him and calls him his destiny.
The good characters make others realize their potentialities. They help others to mend their qualities and achieve truth and freedom. Hugo educates Jake twice, first in showing him what the world looks like to one who lacks pre-conception and the second, at the end by showing him the truth about his relations with the other characters. He symbolizes Jake’s quest for truth. Jake, through his relationship with Hugo acquires an objective perception to seek the truth. Hugo tells Jake:

Why should life be made endurable? I know that nothing consoles and nothing justifies except a story- but that doesn’t stop all stories from being lies. Only the greatest men can speak and still be truthful. Any artist knows this obscurely; he knows that a theory is death and that all expression is weighted with theory. Only the strongest can rise against that weight. For most of us, for almost all of us, truth can be attained, if at all only in silence. (91-92)

Hugo’s injunctions “highlight the Buddhist quest to go beyond the duality of self and world” (Bajaj 93). One must acquire the capacity to love the world, as well as the inhabitants in it. Hugo’s injunctions emphasize man’s vital need to understand himself the supremacy of his self. One must accept the world and know oneself in the true context of the world as it naturally exists.

Hugo-Anna relationship reflects his belief in action and his concern for persons whom he does not love. Though he does not love Anna, he fulfills her dream, by starting a mime theatre for her. Anna pursues him and writes beautiful letters to him. Since he believes in intelligence and finds that intelligence is a refined aspect of life, Anna’s
nature and her qualities fail to attract him. He is more attracted by Sadie, Anna’s sister, because she “is more intelligent” (Net 255). Though he is not in love with Anna, he meets her because he does not want to hurt her feelings. He even does some acting in the theatre to please her.

Good people accept their mistakes and try to correct themselves. They indulge in doing good for others. When Hugo comes to know that Sadie is keen on Jake, he decides not to thrust his love on Sadie. Hugo thinks, if he imposes his love on Sadie, he will be unfair to Jake. He tries to avoid Jake, because he thinks his behaviour with Sadie may offend him. He is ashamed of things he has done. He wants to clear out because certain situations cannot be unraveled, they just have to be dropped. He wants to do so for the benefit of Jake and Sadie. Hugo, being a good person, has the moral courage to admit his wrong deeds. In *Under the Net*, Hugo is thus presented as a morally good man. He has Murdochian good qualities like patience, tolerance and attention to others.

Murdoch’s good characters are usually depicted as humble, to the point of being servile and almost awkward and clumsy. She thinks that there is a genuine mysteriousness attached to the idea of goodness and the good. For Murdoch, good is indefinable. It is a concept that continues to remain sovereign over love. It is the magnetic centre towards which love naturally moves and it becomes the highest part of the soul. Murdoch declares that good continues to be sovereign, even though it is marginalized.

In *An Unofficial Rose*, Ann is presented as a good character on moralistic terms. She manages to stick on to the moralistic principles. She follows the codes of morality
and tries to lead a perfect life, and also controls her evil urges and desires. At a deeper level, Murdoch examines serious moral concerns, portrays the quest for good in life, and includes a strong symbolism. Murdoch’s novels “are filled with generally imperfect individuals struggling with ordinary acts of everyday life in their particular web of human relationships seeking to do good” (Reierson 4). Ann is a prisoner of her nature, so she resides in the world of practical affairs forever beset by incompleteness and lack of form.

Ann, in An Unofficial Rose not only represents convention but is also a symbol of goodness. In Ann, one can find “willingness to accept the opinions of others, to conform to social niceties and an unreflective observance of rules and conventions” (Datta 103). She is domesticated and unselfish and has a strong urge towards good. Randall, Ann’s husband gets irritated by her formlessness and feels muted by her will for self-sacrifice. He tells his father that Ann has ruined him and destroyed his footholds. Moreover, she has no will and saps his energy. For him, Ann “is the destroyer, and the destroyer is the devil. She’s got a kind of openness which makes whatever I do meaningless” (Unofficial 38).

Ann is a symbol of goodness and through Ann’s character Murdoch explores the nature of moral life. Ann is truthful and non-fantasizing. She rejects immediate impulses and the desire for knowledge, and finds refuge in convention and lives in deliberate ignorance. In the words of Pachuau, “it is symptomatic of Murdoch’s characters of the good that either they are structureless themselves or they renounce conventional structures or organized images” (58). Ann fails to improve her relationship with other characters. Due to this nature, her husband develops an extramarital relationship with Lindsay. Ann is unaware of this because she is a tactless woman. She sympathizes for
everybody and tries to do good for others. When Mildred reveals Randall’s affair with Lindsay, Ann says, “I assumed he was having an affair with somebody. I didn’t know who it was. And honestly I don’t care much” (*Unofficial* 136). The good characters are innocent creatures. They do not suspect others. Ann fails to understand her husband and gets rejected by him. Dipple asserts, Ann “is a character of unconscious good” (57). Ann’s loving acceptance and tactless character do not allow her to blame others. Ann-Randall relationship shows how good persons are exploited by the cunning people. Randall takes undue advantage of Ann’s unsuspecting attitudes. He intentionally quarrels with her and creates scene in order to leave Grayhallock. When Ann gives Steve’s things to Penny, without any reason Randall shouts at her. He often blames Ann for the death of their son, Steve. Randall says, “You make me miserable and take everything away from me and then you have the insolence to taunt me about money! I’m not going to stay in this house another bloody minute! And you can have your precious Penny and your precious priesty all to yourself” (*Unofficial* 65). Thus Randall shouts at her not because he suspects anything between Douglas, the priest and Ann, but because he seeks an excuse to leave Ann.

The good characters do not bother about their happiness. They come forward to sacrifice their longings for the sake of others. Similarly, Ann surrenders her will and sacrifices her happiness in favour of retaining a happy home for her daughter Miranda and Randall. After the departure of Randall, Felix, Mildred’s brother courts Ann and wants to marry her. Miranda, who is interested in Felix, tries to prevent her mother from marrying Felix. She says, “I love Daddy. No one must have his place. I don’t want to be a step-daughter” (297). Ann who has been totally blind to her daughter’s love towards
Felix, comes to know about this from the torn photographs and letters of Felix and the newspaper cuttings which Miranda has unconsciously thrown in the bonfire. Ann suppresses her happiness and decides not to marry Felix, in order to please Miranda. Instead of accusing her daughter for not allowing her to lead a happy life with Felix, she accuses herself for being insensitive and blind to the affection of her daughter.

Murdoch presents Ann as the representative of convention. As she is trapped in convention, she declines the proposal of Felix. Felix is a handsome military officer who is in love with Ann. He wants to marry someone like Ann because she seems to him an ideal English woman. Later, he realizes that he does not need someone like Ann, but Ann. Randall’s affair with Lindsay gives him a hope, but Ann’s Christian view of marriage becomes an obstacle for him. Ann refuses to marry him, because she “had always been a member of the church of England, zealous, serious, on the whole undoubting, but a little vague about dogma” (271). Even though she is in love with Felix, she is unable to do anything. Ann possesses a self-sacrificing spirit. She emerges as a selfless character in order to make others happy. She is more concerned about Randall and Miranda than her own marriage with Felix. Felix who is annoyed by her convention, asks Ann “Why don’t you do what you want for once” (301). By marrying Felix she can lead a happy life, but her attitude does not allow her to break the rules. She respects the Christian rules of marriage and tries to adhere to those principles in her day to day life. Murdoch makes the good characters live for others. Her rejection of Felix’s love is a rejection of potential freedom. Datta affirms that “believing in the value of the renunciation of self and crucifixion of one’s selfish desires, she feels that loving and marrying Felix would amount to self gratification” (105). Ann feels that she is still
involved with Randall. She rejects Felix, partly due to Miranda’s willful interference and partly due to her conventional nature.

Murdoch’s novels are aimed at presenting the image of human life. Her good characters lack structure and form. Moreover, they set conventions in their lives and manage to follow them. Dipple points out, Murdoch “generally confines her good characters to the peripheral areas of the novel because their self-denial and negativity make them a trifle insipid” (69). The good characters observe the facts, reasons, the values and choices. They are decidedly alone, surrounded by a world and a language which has no secrets for them. In their world, other people do not exist other than as similar rational agents.

For Murdoch, good is located in the no raging, the quiet, the clear eyed, and loving acceptance of things as they are and as they happen, and above all in selflessness and invisibility. Tallis Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is an epitome of the good. He actively involves in doing good. Like Ann, he remains unappreciated by others even though he does his maximum for others. He is a pathetic, dull, distant, elusive and unresponsive one. He is an impoverished teacher of working class adults, and a pacifist and an earnest social reformer. According to Bajaj, he “represents Murdoch’s vision of starting from real human needs as well as self-denying gentleness” (95). He tries to help everyone, but his goodness is unrecognized by others.

Tallis is morally higher than all the other characters in the novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. In his relationship with his wife Morgan, he remains an ineffectual.
His effort to assert his authority as a husband proves ineffective in front of Morgan’s callousness. Morgan says:

... in some way Tallis is a sick man. He’s perfectly sane, but his sanity is depressing, it lowers one’s vitality. My love for him was always so sort of nervy, and he hadn’t the instincts for making things easy and nice. Tallis has got no inner life, no real conception of himself, there’s a sort of emptiness. *(Fairly 48)*

Morgan feels that Tallis has no myth and develops an extramarital relationship with Julius. When she writes to him about her affair with Julius, Tallis gives her a free rope and does not compel her to come back to him because he happens to be a conventional character. Tallis does not want to control his wife for his own interest. Murdoch makes him rise above his self-interest.

Tallis appreciates others not as extension of himself, but as unique individuals. Thus he does not act on Rupert’s advice and take possession of Morgan as if his property. He exhibits in his relations with others a true love not marred by an overwhelming sense of self, which is not authoritative or possessive. Tallis’s pulling the cartbarrow carrying Morgan’s luggage through the busy streets of London, brings into focus the sacrifice of the saintly characters made for the suffering humanity. Like Christ stumbling along the way to his crucifixion under the weight of his cross, Tallis pauses several times in the heat and under the weight of his own affliction.

Tallis is a complex character, and the other characters sense this. His goodness does not come across in easily accessible terms. Pachuau opines, “laced with overtones of
self defeat and rejection by the world, the good characters find it difficult to function normally” (72). For Morgan, Tallis “represented holy poverty or some such stuff” (Fairly 196). For Morgan’s sister Hilda, Tallis is such a “sort of runt” (25). He is a spiritless, kind, feeble and wet. Hilda feels that he is “a man without ideas” (25). Tallis has faced many failures and disappointments, but he overcomes them and with a kind of magnanimity he adapts himself to a vision of harmony and equilibrium when life seems to fail him.

Tallis lives by the philosophy of love. In his relationship with his father, Tallis remains completely nervous and suffers with the torture of indecision. He does not place any distance between himself and his father Leonard. He does not tell his father that he suffers from cancer because this would break his spirit. He serves and nurses him sincerely, affectionately and ungrudgingly. The selfless service is seen only in self-effacing characters. Even his father considers him stupid, Tallis projects all of his being into him and attends him lovingly. Deprived of all significance in the eyes of the world, Tallis alone can provide Leonard with some sense of self-worth. Tallis values human life and has a great love for his father.

Murdoch makes the good active at the critical juncture. When Axel, Simon, Julius, and Tallis see a Jamaican youth gets assaulted in the restaurant, it is Tallis who takes the personal risk of attacking the white man. He “struck him with the flat of his hand but with such violence that the boy staggered back against his companion and almost fell to the floor” (214). He alone springs to action for the cessation of cruelty and good people thus risk their own lives to save the lives of others. His generous acts,
passive and least interfering temperament are shown to be the only route for the expression of good.

Tallis has got the ability to use instinct as well as logic in making moral decisions. His apprehension of virtue cannot be divorced from metaphysical concepts. He is the only person whose advice Julius heeds and respects. In his first meeting with Tallis, Julius understands him “as a very strange little person” (72). He also agrees with Simon that Tallis is a marvelous man. When Morgan pesters Julius to accept her, he suggests her to go back to Tallis. Tallis has an understanding of life. It is Tallis who loves with blank hope and blank faith. He does not have malice or hostility towards Julius and Morgan. Even though Julius takes away Morgan from him, Tallis loves and respects him. He is not tempted to act in any other way. In spite of everyone’s urging, he follows his instincts.

Tallis’s approach to social problems is a simple one. His analysis is marked by a beautiful simplicity that tends to ignore the complexities of social and political structure. Dipple explains, “obscure pure knowledge which cannot be fitted into words” (21). Though Tallis has many afflictions and problems, he offers Peter, Hilda’s son accommodation in his house. He tries to reform the boy with his philosophy of love. Tallis helps to dispel the demons from Peter with an act of love. Unlike Rupert, with his attempt to write his son a letter, Tallis gives of himself in a way befitting his quality of spirit.

Tallis is elusive and incredible. He represents the Murdochian idea of good. His typical goodness can be interpreted in the light of its correspondence to the explicit ideal which Murdoch says:
The good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose . . . . The only genuine way to 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. That ‘for nothing’ is indeed the experienced correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself. (Sovereignty 69-70)

Throughout the novel, Murdoch presents Tallis as a rather ineffectual person who tries to be and do good, but his vague actions lead to irritation and frustration. None of the characters sees Tallis truly as part of relationships. In their eyes, he has opted out of society. Hilda, Morgan’s sister says “there’s something awfully flat about Tallis” (Fairly 61). There is a lack of true presence, being or depth to Tallis.

According to Murdoch, a sense of being or self is necessary to be a part of a relationship. The only place where goodness makes sense is in relation to others. Tallis’s problem is that he has no self and is elusive and unrecognizable as good. In the acceptance of his nothingness, he is enabled to reach out and become part of relationships. In doing so, he becomes a good man and a good individual. It is as nothing, he truly sees the other and thereby represents the goodness of a real person.

Murdoch examines man’s struggle to become free and separate though related to a rich and complicated world. As a moral being, man has much to learn from this struggle. The ‘Ordinary Language Man’ is accredited to the Logical Positivists. He sees himself as:

. . . rational and totally free except in so far as- in the most ordinary law-court and commonsensical sense-his degree of self-awareness may vary.
He is morally speaking monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him. His moral language is a practical pointer, the instrument of his choices, the indication of his preferences . . . . His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decisions. The only moral word he requires is ‘good’ (or ‘right’) the word which expresses decision . . . . The virtue which is fundamental to him is sincerity. (“Dryness” 17)

Thus Murdoch makes the conventional characters to act rightly and conservatively. Her good characters are filled with sympathy, affection and concern for others. They do not sacrifice their conventions for their own benefits. Even though, the other characters fail to respect and love them, they go on loving and caring for others. At times, due to their conventionality, they fail to understand the thoughts and desires of others. Due to this nature, they become objects of ridicule to others. Murdoch’s figures of good show how immensely difficult it is to be or to do good in a world of scientific rationalism. Ramanathan states, Murdoch’s novels offer “a precious zig sagging between an overhanging amoral world that looms and threatens in a most disturbing way, a path beaten out by these marginal good figures as they make their way through the jungle of self and society” (2). In Murdoch’s works these good characters show how goodness operates in the world. The marginality of these figures is crucially connected with the nature of the good. It is as if good can be itself only if it is on the periphery of the world of behaviour.

Most of the Murdochian characters belong to the group of neurosis. Contrary to the good characters, these characters are self-centred and self-interested persons.
Neurosis lays more stress on primitive internal reality. It is a state of being enclosed in a fantasy world of one’s own into which one tries to draw things from outside. The ‘Totalitarian Man’ is a solitary moral agent, absolutely free and self-enclosed to the extent of neurosis. His “highest value is his own will, his own assertion of his solitary self, against a society suffering from an absence of God and its own hypocrisy and pointlessness” (“Sublime Revisited” 7). The emphasis on choice, will and disillusioned exercise of complete freedom characterize his moral life. All values have collapsed into his omnipotent sincerity. He too wishes the world to see his virtue as sincerity by taking great care to present himself to others as he views himself. He looks at others as menaces and objects to be manipulated rather than loved. This excessive self-preoccupation hinders him from establishing contact with other human beings.

Murdoch is concerned not so much with self-analysis as with its consequences. A man has to attain self-knowledge through the act of love. A solipsistic person who has treated other objects for convenience suddenly finds his self-enclosed world threatened. His life must undergo a change that will radically alter his views. His ego, which he has accepted as determined and fixed, must be renewed to accept the existence of others. In order to get this experience, he must gain the knowledge of love.

The knowledge of reality and freedom is not easy to accomplish in the world if one is guided by ego and selfishness. In Murdoch’s scheme for aesthetic and ethical values love of freedom constitute the central concerns underpinned by a “revolt against conviction and fantasy, defiance of the neurotic ego on the one hand and assertion of sanity fearlessness, perception of reality and righteousness of action, on the other” (Kashyap 3). The actions of the characters in her novels are justified by rationality. Man
has the inclination to defend his thoughts 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 it 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 realize his own defects and sin would get the opportunity to see his true self.

Murdoch’s novels portray obsessional relationships in which one person’s love for another is simply expressive of a specific need rather than a sense of the reality of other. In *Under the Net*, Murdoch presents Jake as a private will and an isolated free chooser at odds with the social spirit. The kind of freedom he enjoys is negative in nature. He avoids entangling relationships. He says:

> I hate solitude, but I am afraid of intimacy. The substance of my life is a private conversation with myself which to turn into a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction. The company which I need is the company which a pub or a café will provide. I have never wanted a communion of souls. (*Net* 34)

Thus Jake is pictured as a self-centred man who cannot enjoy being responsible for other people. At the same time, he loves being protected and relishes being a parasite on his friends.

Jake’s self-involvement, and his inability to accept contingency are traits he shares with the Sartrean heroes. *Under the Net* was published in 1954 one year after the
completion of Murdoch’s critical work _Sartre: Romantic Rationalist_. Murdoch’s primary interest in Sartre is in his philosophy. Jake, as he appears at the beginning of the novel, resembles self-involved characters in Sartre’s novels, particularly Antoine Roquentin, the hero of _La Nausee_. Like Roquentin, Jake has a horror of contingency. Murdoch views, “both Jake and Roquentin have this detestation of “swooning abundance” (Sartre 3).

Jake, like those heroes, likes to have a passionate desire to analyze, to build intellectually pleasing schemes and patterns. He is obsessive and neurotic, needs to exert control over his surroundings and to keep his world at a simple, and understandable level.

Jake’s attitude towards personal relationships and his general inclination to impose the form or myth of his own fantasy on the people around him is visible in his relationship with Madge and Finn. In his isolated world, Jake fails to acknowledge the separate existence of the other characters, although he is reminded constantly of their individual intentions. He imposes his own theories upon others, and fails to consider their individualized complexities. Jake shares Madge’s flat shamelessly without any rent, but fails to show any interest in her. He says “We had lived there as snug as a pair of walnuts in their shells” (Net 10). He makes no efforts to understand the feelings of others. When Finn informs that Madge is about to get married, he complains, “She never told me anything” (9). For that Finn gives an appropriate reply, “you never asked anything” (9). The knowledge of reality and freedom is very difficult to attain in this world where one is guided by ego and selfishness.

The same inattention marks Jake’s dealings with Finn. In his solipsism, Jake treats Finn as a mirror of himself rather than an independent being who has an inner life of his own. He knows nothing about Finn’s views and beliefs. He discusses his own ideas on
God, freedom and immortality with him. He says, “I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe and cannot conceive that he has one containing me” (9). Jake has always taken Finn for granted and has never taken seriously his plans to return to Ireland.

Murdoch, in her novels, demonstrates how forms and myths created by fantasy can completely enslave and curtail liberty. Jake’s egocentric fantasy limits his vision. It breeds illusions that are like forms or myths imposed on reality. Most of the characters of Murdoch’s novels are seen working out their fantasy lives in terms of some suitable pattern. According to Murdoch, the ultimate aim in morals is to achieve objectivity which is but freedom from self-preoccupation and fantasy. In the case of Hugo too, Jake distorts reality to fit his own preconceptions of it. Jake first meets Hugo in the Cold Cure Research Establishment, where both of them had offered themselves as guinea pigs in the cold cure experiments. Jake is highly impressed by Hugo’s ideas and under his spell starts to see the whole world anew. Jake feels that he “was meeting for the first time an almost completely truthful man . . .” (69). Jake stands as a contrast because he is a young selfish man who does not like working. He utilizes the situation for his own benefit and takes advantage of Hugo, especially Hugo’s ideas, for a new book without his permission to become successful with The Silencer. Jake’s egoism is his negative quality.

Jake’s lack of concern for others and his fear of intimacy are evident in his reasons for drifting apart from Anna, the woman whom he believes loves him. Jake’s pursuit of Anna also proves to be based on false generalizations about her personality and her theory of art. Jake is concurrently fascinated and repulsed by her without knowing that she is interested in Hugo. He fails to understand her feelings and aspirations. Devoid of
Anna’s mind set, he thinks that she loves him. For Jake, love “is concerned with possession” (45). Instead of knowing others, he lives under illusions and fantasy.

Murdoch has pointed out that art is the vision of love as it is split from the messiness of ordinary love relationships, which becomes enmeshed in the mechanism of the possessive ego. Jake, as a writer, finds his creative urges, have been silenced. When he is in the world of illusion, Jake thinks money plays a great role in human relations. It is only for the sake of money, he translates the French novels of Jean Pierre Breteuil. When he lives with Madgelan without any rent, he does not bother about others. It is only after he is turned out of his rent free accommodation, he thinks of his friends. Nakagami opines, Jake “disbelieves in the power of words to capture any fragments of the essence or nature of things or people in the world” (16). Here Jake is in an egoistic condition and his creative faculties are in an almost dried up situation. He does not have a vision of reality and is unable to create a work of art, though he is a writer.

Jake lacks commitment to work and to political and social demands. He deplores the idea of work and regards it deadly because work threatens to dehumanize an individual. He avoids creative writing because, he believes that “the present age was not one in which it was possible to write an epic and possibly not even a novel” (Net 21). Jake is a failed artist, who has stopped doing original work and earns his living by translating the novels of the French writer, Jean Pierre Breteuil. He enjoys translating because it is easy and it sells. Moreover, it is “like opening one’s mouth and hearing someone else’s voice emerge” (22).
Jake regards the fight for socialism as hopeless and explains to Lefty that his lack of involvement is a combination of not caring and not knowing what to do. His achievement of this social and artistic involvement is hindered by his sense of estrangement from his physical surroundings. His lack of involvement seems to stem primarily from his lack of self-knowledge. He tries to maintain order in his life by living under the protective care of others. Kumari points out, “the wavering mind and indecisiveness nature of Jake make him do picaresque events in his life and force him to go from one place to other place and meet people” (54). Afraid of self-destruction, he purposely maintains a distance between himself and others. The type of company he prefers is the company that a pup or a café provides. He states, “I had been to these pubs a hundred times in the last few years . . . ” (Net 36). This distance that Jake intentionally tries to maintain prevents him from recognizing the uniqueness of other persons. This inability to perceive and accept people as they are draws Jake away from other people.

Selfishness is the crucial word in Murdoch’s description of human beings. Human beings are very selfish, concerned with their own anxieties, safety and well-being. In order to protect themselves they act like a machine. Jake is a half-outsider, who deliberately chooses to occupy a marginal position. Kashyap opines, throughout the novel The Under the Net, the protagonist, Jake “lives on the world of convention and fantasy, deeply stressed as he is in the state of neurotic egotism and insanity” (416). Jake is alienated because of his existential, solipsistic view which rejects the reality. He sees freedom and romance in a pervasive 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. Murdoch views that this kind of people
can be saved only by true morality. True morality grows out of actual encounters with others. Sullivan points out, “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” (558).

Freedom is a recurrent theme in Murdoch’s fiction. Her novels are basically concerned with moral, psychological and artistic freedom. It is centred on personal relationships and involves the discovery of the reality of others. For Murdoch, “Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves” (“Sublime” 284). She places the utmost value on the unique, precious, irreducible and unpredictable individual, but she pictures him in a society consisting of other independent and unique individuals. His liberty is therefore, contingent upon that of others. To her, real moral and psychological freedom lies in understanding the others’ existence by taking them into account and conferring upon them an equal status.

Freedom is an important aspect of Murdoch’s moral philosophy. The main theme in The Flight from the Enchanter is the search for human freedom both social and personal. Personal freedom is linked with social freedom in the sense that while the body may be free, the mind is not necessarily so. In The Flight from the Enchanter, Rosa Keepe’s characterization involves the delineation of the novel’s theme, the struggle for social and personal freedom against restrictive forces. She is a shareholder of the ‘Artemis,’ a periodical connected with women’s rights. She has inherited her share from her late mother, who herself a suffragette and a Fabian. Unlike her mother, Rosa avoids close contacts with other people in what the paper symbolizes. Rosa is aware that Mischa
Fox wants the paper to put her in a dilemma. This is a point at which the two freedoms are linked.

The personal and social tensions linking the ‘Artemis’ and Mischa are aggravated by Rosa’s employment as a machine operator in a factory. According to Hunter, Rosa’s brother, “She wants to be in touch with the people and to make her life colourless” (Flight 15). She is named after “Rosa Luxemburg” (15), the founder of the German Communist Party, who was killed in a street demonstration in 1919. However, Rosa is not concerned with communistic principles and with women’s rights. She comes to the factory at a difficult period in her life. She is conscious of her failure as a teacher and “had never recovered from the gloom and cynicism with which she had entered the trade” (44), because of the frustrations experienced in her journalistic career. She is not socially conscious of the factory workers. Her boring work in the factory isolates her from personal contact with people. Murdoch explains her detached experience in the following lines:

Deep is her heart, however, although she had not admitted it to anyone, she had hoped that she would get to know some of her workmates; she had even hoped that, somehow or other, she might be able to help them . . . she remained at a distance from them, eccentric, solitary, only just failing to be an object of suspicion . . . . Life became impersonal and mechanical; and this even pleased her too, satisfying some deep and perhaps despairing desire for peace. (45)
Rosa’s life in the factory becomes impersonal and dull. She tries to animate this mechanical existence by naming her machine Kitty.

Rosa maintains a distance between herself and the other characters because she is afraid of intimate relationships. Her alienation from the other characters springs from her distrust of intimate relationships and her inability to perceive the uniqueness of individuals. She “never wanted other human beings to come too near” (45). When Nina approaches her for help, she is blind to the dressmaker’s urgent need. Mischa keeps Nina imprisoned by giving only financial aid. He denies her either love or guidance. When she devises a plan to escape from Mischa, the only person she trusts is Rosa. When Rosa fails to help her, Nina finds no way to escape and commits suicide. Nina becomes the victim of Rosa’s egoism. This inability to perceive and accept people as they are draws Rosa away from the other people. It also prevents her from recognizing the impact of her actions on other people.

Murdoch is fascinated by the problem of human freedom. Her definition of human freedom is different from the commonly understood idea of freedom. 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 which is other and distinct from the loving object. Hence in the philosophy of Murdoch, freedom and love are closely connected. The acceptance of this otherness in all its particularity and incomprehensibility is love.

Rosa gains satisfaction through involvement in conventional, empiric action and in exercising her will in relationships. She finds such a relationship with the Lusiewicz
brothers. While working in the impersonal environment of the factory, Rosa meets Jan and Stefan Lusiewicz, the refugees. Their relationship begins in a casual way as she teaches them English and helps them to adapt to England. She gets satisfaction in exercising her will over these refugees from the inhumanity of war. Initially, the two young brothers resemble, “half-starved, half-drowned animals” (43). Rosa herself experiences a sense of power in moulding them into shape. She “feared this power, but enjoyed it too . . . she felt as if she had received a pair of young leopards as a present” (46).

Rosa offers herself in person to make up for the brothers’ homelessness and tries to ease their suffering. Rosa’s role as teacher to the brothers is a romantic attempt to change the world as she finds it. It is an egoistic move that relieves the boredom of her retreat from the real world. Her secret has become “simple, with the simplicity hardly of beauty or goodness but of a monochromatic tedium” (Flight 44-45). Rosa inhabits in a fantasy world in which the brothers are part of her obsession. She treats them as her children. But soon Rosa becomes possessive of the pair. Murdoch ironically describes Rosa’s feelings as:

She felt like the princess whose strong faith releases the prince from an enchanted sleep, or from the transfigured form of a beast. As her pair of princes awoke into the English tongue and as they were able more and more to reveal themselves to her, she found in them a hundred-fold the intelligence, the humour and the joy at which she had at first only guessed. (51)
They become her secret and consider her an object and in turn, possess her and enslave her in their empty bed-frame. They become masters not only of Rosa’s body but also of her life.

The only person Rosa feels close is to her brother and their intimacy nevertheless makes her feel near to him. She fails to recognize Hunter’s deep love and dependence on her. Rosa and her brother suffer at the hands of the brothers who gradually begin to dominate their lives. Hunter suffers a delirious illness on account of his anxieties and because of a horrid nocturnal incident in which Stefan, one of the brothers, sets fire to his hair and threatens to kill him. Since she is preoccupied with her fantasy about the demonic brothers and the mythical enchanter, Rosa cannot recognize Hunter’s terrible psychological pain which presents itself as a physical illness. She “had her own theories about the cause of Hunter’s sickness, but as they were too fantastic to reveal to the doctor, she kept them to herself” (259). Thus Rosa is engrossed in her own problems and does not show any anxiety about Hunter.

In the background of Rosa’s affair with Lusiewicz brothers, she also maintains her relationship with Peter Saward who loves her. Peter is aware that Rosa does not share the same feelings. Peter is a foil for Mischa, because he is basically powerless, and unlike Mischa he does not try to possess Rosa. He realizes that Rosa does not love him and she enjoys basking in the reflection of Peter’s adoration of her. Her self-centeredness does not allow her to accept him as she finds she would become bored with his adoration. He senses this and protects them both from this eventuality by refusing to marry her.
To Rosa, Mischa becomes a figure of subjugation. She is under the influence of Mischa, whom ten years earlier she had declined to marry because she saw his power as evil. She refused to marry him because she felt “there was a demon in Mischa which she had never been able to know and which had never allowed them to be at peace” (237). After Rosa’s first flight, Mischa tries to entrap her once again through ‘Artemis’ an attempt which is forcefully resisted by Rosa. When his attempts to conquer Rosa by acquiring the ‘Artemis’ fail, he destroys her romance by using her relationship with the Lusiewicz brothers to humiliate her.

Rosa fears of Mischa’s power, but at the same time, she is fascinated by it. The inevitability of the situation in which Rosa is compelled to go in pursuit of Mischa Fox dawns on her, when she visualizes that moral value is essential for discovering the real from illusion. Rosa builds an emotional illusion of queer love for Mischa and strives to bind herself permanently to this illusion. In the meantime she becomes ignorant to the fact that Mischa although a symbol of fantasy is individualistic by himself and steers himself clear of all such mishaps. Rosa fails to see that fantasy in any form arrests the leading of a moral life. In order to lead an ordered life, she should learn to guard herself against all such fantastic illusions.

Rosa is a totalitarian character who is overwhelmed by the hostility of society and retreats into a completely egoistic state from which she is unable to exercise her own will. The distance or alienation between the individual self and society has been defined as “a condition in which the individual shows a lack of involvement and a feeling of distance between himself and his physical surroundings, his fellowmen and last but not least,
between himself and himself” (Weisskopf-Joelson 57). Through Rosa, Murdoch presents the complete breakdown of the moral concept of the liberal man.

Murdoch’s novels explore the major concerns of freedom, form, choice making, contingency and goodness. She gives undue importance to the concept of self. Her neurotic characters pay no attention to the reality of others. Masong points out, neurosis “is consciousness eating up its surroundings, the disastrous implosion of the external into the internal” (22). Trusting the existential statement that they are free to know the world, they indulge in form making. In An Unofficial Rose, Randall is afflicted by the same malady but the form he is in search of symbolizes the existential search for individuality, being or selfhood. Randall is a victim of neurosis. It drives him to forsake his wife, daughter and a stable marriage for an empty idea of freedom. Randall studied rose culture at the Reading University. He met Ann while he was studying there. Later, he mastered this art in the Peroret nursery by developing several prize-winning roses. His painstaking work, patience and skill bloom into new varieties of roses.

Randall needs a different formal world and form. For him, Ann is a destroyer and an incarnate spirit of the negative without the presence of a form. He complaints that Ann has ruined his life. He finds nothing in her to encounter, no force or resistance that could have given him a pass to perfected identity. Eventually he recoils from her and looks for it elsewhere. His irritable fits of depression, recourse to liquor and his desertion of Ann are all evidences of the discontent with his wife’s lack of form. He hates Ann because she does not have form. For Randall, Ann “is a hysterical woman” (39). As a writer, he even says that Ann’s formlessness destroys his imagination.
Like Jake, Murdoch presents Randall as a character who does not accept contingency. He expects his life to have a visible shape. He aspires for form in his life. Ann too admits that “Randall wants everything to have form” (134). He forgets that form in art is one thing, but trying to look for it is the disorderliness of human world. It is not only a frustrating search, but is also morally wrong. Rabinovitz remarks, “the existential quest for liberty with its insistence on withdrawal from society and on cutting off superficial ties with others is displayed in the dreams of Randall” (32). Such people lack love and tolerance towards others.

One of the moral and aesthetic terms of Murdoch is attention. In Widdows words, “Attention, then, provides a way to break through the ego and to see the real more clearly” (106). Attention would lead to accurate vision and proper action, so in Murdoch’s philosophy the idea of attention is closely related to the concept of goodness. But Randall fails to attend his wife in pursuit of freedom and form. He considers his marriage as a muddy immersion in a false state of affairs. It is a kind of trap he wants to escape from. He searches for freedom from this dull, lifeless wedlock through a torrid affair with a younger woman. His need for a different and formal world tempts him to enter an indefinable relationship with Lindsay. To him, she is a symbol of freedom, will and intelligence. He feels proud and considers it “the best thing he had ever done. It had that absolute authority which seems to put an act beyond the range of right and wrong” (Unofficial 72). He finds in Lindsay a strongly, well-defined self and personality. By entering her world, Randall thinks he would be lifted into the airy world of imagination denied by Ann’s anonymity and negativeness.
In certain novels there is a unifying central symbol frequently suggested by their titles. *An Unofficial Rose* exhibits Murdoch’s efforts to combine realism with a deft use of symbolism. The rose is the central symbol of the novel. It is associated with Randall and his creation of floribundas and hybrid teas. These official roses are grown, cultivated and exhibited annually at Grayhallock. These roses are contrasted with the unofficial dog rose. The dogrose possesses natural beauty and a natural form. The cultivated official roses are symbols of determinism and the human urge to impose a form on nature. Murdoch equates Ann with the dogrose and Randall with the official rose. For Randall, Ann “is as messy and flabby and open as a bloody dogrose” (39). Randall’s obsessive search for form in life is an outcome of the shapes he has engrafted on the roses. Murdoch, thus through the roses, reveals the attractiveness towards form by the official roses and the moral need of accepting the less appealing contingency by the unofficial rose.

Murdoch’s novels include many characters who realize that they are doomed to mundane happiness and mediocrity. The circumstances of their lives prevent them from ‘abiding the quest for the nature of truth. Human conduct is often affected by the mechanical energy of an ego-centric kind. The mind in its relentless egoism habitually mistakes false images of the good for good itself. Hannah Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn* is the character who submissively yields to the punishment for her sinful act. Hannah the young fragile looking woman has been trapped in her own house for seven years by her husband Peter. She is meek, tolerant and gentle on the surface. From the view of her motive and character, she is a frantic and egocentric woman.
In *The Unicorn*, Murdoch relies on the Gothic framework to produce a suitably closed atmosphere of fantasy and enchantment which cramps moral progress and keeps freedom at bay. For her, the Gothic form is not just a literary exercise, “it is a device for the transmission of serious religious and philosophical ideas as well as for demonstrating the falsity of the prevalent concepts that govern one’s spiritual and moral life” (Datta 33). *The Unicorn* is set in a remote coastal region with a castle, a swamp, and cliffs above. Murdoch gives “the landscape a romantic power over the characters” (Punja 40). The Castle is a prison for Hannah, cursed by her husband to remain inside for seven years. The Gothic setting and this situation enable Murdoch to construct a mythical atmosphere in which she can discover a variety of ideas about good and evil, guilt and innocence, and freedom.

Naturally, Hannah is a frantic woman, “an egoist and an abnormal daydreamer” (Zhuo 58). The reasons for her captivity within the confines of the castle are ambiguous. She undergoes a seven-year period of willed spiritual suffering as a penitential exercise for her adultery with Pip Lejour and for an attempt to kill her husband. So her husband has left her imprisoned in the castle. She is attended by Gerald Scottow, a friend of Peter. After one abortive attempt to escape, Hannah is resigned to her condition and accepts it as a kind of religious vocation in spiritual suffering, self denial and purification.

Hannah is a kind of power-figure who has awakened the adoration and fantasies of those who cluster around her. She hinders her moral and psychological freedom by commanding restrictions. Hannah’s violent attempt of killing her husband is the initial reflection of her frantic nature. According to Cubukcu, “Her egocentric motivation is flexibly concealed by her image of being a weak victim and her strategies to tempt her
spiritual slaves” (69). Her lack of freedom is the result of her own unconscious needs and a neurotic obsession with guilt. She accepts the passive suffering and waits for the return of her husband. Her acceptance stems from a neurotic tendency rather than a submissive acceptance of the dictates of convention and duty.

Hannah’s abstention from society appears explicable in Freudian terms as an obsessional guilt leading to a recourse to fantasy in order to avoid confrontation with unpleasant reality. According to Freud, for those suffering from obsessional prohibitions, “an external threat of punishment is superfluous, because an inner certainty (a conscience) exists that violation will be followed by unbearable disaster” (37). Hannah’s neurosis is an escape from an unsatisfactory reality made up of the community men into a world of fantasy. She lives in self-imprisonment, surrounded by a group of companions who are enchanted with her condition. Marian tells her, “. . . everyone is devoted to you” (Unicorn 43). She is self-absorbed and self-absorption is an enemy to love and freedom in Murdoch’s ethics. This prevents her to love others. Max Lejour refers to her incapacity to love other human beings as:

She loved what wasn’t there, what was absent. This can be dangerous. Only she did not dare to love what was present too . . . she could not really love the people she saw, she could not afford to, it would have made the limitations of her life too painful. She could not, for them, transform the idea of love into something manageable: it remained something destructive and fearful and she simply avoided it. (254)
Hannah’s self-imprisonment symbolizes an imprisonment by fantasy. As an enchanter, she is the most dangerous kind, a dispenser of dreams who does not dispel others’ fantasy, but fosters it. Wolfe calls her “a demoralizing force” (190). She prevents the formation of direct relationship among others.

Murdoch gradually reveals Hannah’s psychology and attractive actions. She makes the other characters develop a strong and helpless passion for her. Effingham is an outsider in the world of Gaze and a regular visitor to the Riders. In his mind she “was the only one, the great phoenix, his truth, his home . . .” (Unicorn 88). He feels a thrilling gratitude to her for being the cause of so great a love. Hannah wants to keep her throne, her territory and her mysterious image of being an enchanter of others. Her devotion and love to others and her hopelessness are the protective cover of her tricks to get well towards her set objective. She tells Marian, “Do you know what part I have been playing? That of God” (218). Like a treacherous witch, she uses the most of her magic to control everyone in order to fulfill her purpose.

Murdoch’s novels are rich in allusive details and this use of allusion is one of the devices employed in the building of characters. In The Unicorn, the central allusion as indicated by the title is medieval. In mythology, the unicorn is depicted as a glorious white horse with a goat’s beard and a long twisted horn. The medieval legend has portrayed it as a ferocious animal. The animal is also associated with purity since it could only be captured by a maiden. It also has religious significance in connection with the Virgin Mary and Jesus. The traditional association of the unicorn “is with Christ, who came to the world to redeem sin but was imprisoned in the sinful human flesh thus inflicting great suffering on himself” (Datta 34).
The religious aspect of the legend is brought out in Hannah’s acceptance of confinement at Gaze as a form of expiatory suffering. She expiates others by suffering so that those who gaze at her may be purified. But throughout the novel, the readers find no relevance between Hannah and the image of the unicorn. She is practically the opposite of what the unicorn generally symbolizes. Hannah is an utter egoist both in spirit and action. Everything she does is only for herself. She has broken her marriage vows, and has brought a terrible retribution down upon herself, but in her enigmatic position as a prisoner she becomes a romantic figure for others. She is a “murderous adulterous woman” (Unicorn 181). Hannah’s suffering is not a truly spiritual act but an attempt to buying back evil by suffering in the embrace of good. Instead of purification it leads to undue self-involvement and finally to violence. Datta comments, Hannah “makes an impure, parodic and romantic attempt on virtue” (45).

Love is always a matter of commanding interest to Murdoch and forms the substance of her novels. She refers to two kinds of love. The first one, romantic love which is egocentric and has a great source of fantastic illusion, whereas real love is selfless and involves the apprehension of reality. Knowledge of reality can be acquired through a clarity of vision and disciplined overcoming of the self and fantasy.

In The Nice and the Good the philosophical ideas and moral principles are worked out at the experimental level. Ducane, in The Nice and the Good is a Scottish puritan whose chief ambition is to lead a “clean, simple life and to be a good man” (Nice 32). This desire of Ducane is almost like a rationalist’s egocentric dream of freedom. It also shows his fear of contingency and messy human relationships. He remains a bachelor at the age of forty three. He enjoys the supreme state of independence from all entangling
relationships except those that are convenient to him. He is the legal adviser to Octavian Gray who is a Bureau chief at the Whitehall. Ducane is a disciplined and virtuous scholar, and is very anxious to be good. He is assigned to investigate the suicide of Radeechy. By virtue of this investigation, he is given power over others. Todd opines that Ducane’s “exercise of power is seen to be less dilettante and more closely related to obligations to society” (51).

Ducane’s egoism and distorted concept of freedom is more apparent in his attempt to break his affair with Jessica. He wants to be free for reasons chiefly associated with his Puritanism that cannot break a long, secret and messy affair. His passion for orderliness and form is stronger than his love for Jessica. Ducane wants to tie up the past in order to conform freely to the pattern of a simple, clean and good life framed by himself. Jessica refuses to be cleared away. She is attracted by Ducane’s “stability, his alien solidness and slowness, his belongingness to the establishment, his age, above all his Puritanism” (Nice 83). Looking up to his wisdom, she longs to be instructed and guided by him. His refusal to attend to her needs is a refusal to face the contingent reality of another person. He wants to set her free of his power because he has no plans of marrying her. His motives are tainted by selfishness, particularly because he wants to carry on the Platonic fantasy relationship with Kate Gray, wife of Octavian Gray.

For Ducane, the most wonderful thing about Kate is that she is unattainable, her happy marriage does not pose a threat to his independence. He says, “he felt certain how that he could commit himself to Kate, and through her to her family and to her whole household” (30). His affair with her is symbolic of his insistence on a safe and simple way of life. He knows that for Kate there is nothing but joy in the prospect of caging
him. Bove argues, “the accidental nature of their lives causes individuals like Ducane to lose control over their lives and hence to become anxiety-ridden and selfish people” (6). He also knows that in order to love Kate in innocence he should be free and truthful and for that he must end completely the muddled compromise with Jessica.

Ducane is only interested in himself. His guilty consciousness prevents him from seeing himself accurately. His quest for goodness is impeded by this demon of guilt. Since his own interest is involved in it he gets confused. More than Jessica, he wants to keep himself free. He has an image of his own self as a pure innocent good man. For Kate, Ducane “is a man who doesn’t make muddles” (Nice 63). He wants to present himself in this image to Kate. He is afraid of being caught a liar. Murdoch explains:

However, as he also believed, the only point of severity with the past is improvement of the future . . . . Ducane’s thoughts were further confused here by the familiar accusing voice which informed him that he was only so anxious now to simplify his life in order to have a clear conscience, a more grossly a clear field, for his highly significant commitment to Kate. Yet was it not plain that he ought, whatever his motives for it might be, to break absolutely with Jessica and to see her no more? (76)

Thus Murdoch presents Ducane as a self-centred character. For his betterment, he comes forward to end his relationship with Jessica. Egoism is an evil aspect which will not allow one to view the desires and aspirations of others. Ducane is a self-centered man, caring only for himself.
An important factor which prevents man’s gaining moral and psychological freedom is the excessive preoccupation with the past. Living obsessively in the past is a kind of mental enslavement which not only prevents one from facing the present but also hinders attending to others. Murdoch says, “Obsessions shrink reality to a single pattern” (*Fire* 79). The situation worsens when the obsession is accompanied by guilt. Such a feeling leads the ingenious self to play a demonic role.

From his superior position, Ducane refuses to accord independent and equal status to others. By becoming a focus of their fantasies and myths, he increases their self-enchantment. They consider him as a god who can resolve their problems and give meaning to their inadequate existence. He provides an illusory consolation by imposing a form on their experience. In his endeavour to be a good man, Ducane plays the priestly role of a father confessor or an advisor to the characters at Trescombe. Baldanza comments, he “is the avuncular ear for all the disturbed characters who attribute to him powers as a dispenser of advice and consolation” (146). He is respected by them and they confide in him. He is the only person to whom Mary Clothere relates the intolerable memory of her husband’s ghastly accident. When Paula is disturbed over some secret trouble and does not unburden to anyone else, Mary requests Ducane to intervene. She says, “Paula would tell you. She is terribly fond of you and you’ve got authority with her too, well you have with all of us” (*Nice* 269).

Paula under Ducane’s magnetic influence reveals her anxiety about the anticipated arrival of her former lover who forebodes trouble. Similarly, her husband Richard Biranne later discloses to Ducane what could have damaged his job and reputation. In fact to all of them, he is a godlike figure. Like an enchanter or god, he
freely exercises his charm on them. They attribute to him powers and qualities that grow out of their own fantasy and a desire for consolation. He “wins a reputation for respectability and ‘niceness’ which is different from ‘goodness’” (Datta 117).

For Murdoch, unbridled conduct and emotional unrestraint are not freedom. She feels that human beings do lose their freedom through neurosis or obsession. An ideal freedom is connected with goodness and virtue. Tripathi avers, “For Murdoch the journey of every character in the novel from illusion to reality, from lie to truth and from bondage to liberty is real freedom” (153). She feels that freedom is very difficult to attain because the original urges and desires would hinder the freedom of a person. Such a person’s actions, behaviour and thoughts will be controlled by the sinful ideas or the evil intentions in his mind. Murdoch pictures man as essentially unfree. The freedom he can gain is earned in a slow process and is ever liable to regression. Freedom entails a clarity of perception exercised in interaction with others. This other centredness requires unselfing and living in the present. It also involves the acceptance of contingency and the real world existing powerfully beyond one’s control instead of setting for the one created by fantasy. Most of the characters of Murdoch’s novels translate reality into a series of subjective magical devices or forms that they conveniently bestow on others obliterating the distinction between fantasy and reality. They create aesthetic orderly schemes for what is formless. They devise roles for themselves and others and are entrapped in the artificial network.

As a novelist and philosopher, Murdoch is concerned with the human tendency to see the world through the distortion of fantasy. The individual gets only a false vision of the world and views at others only means of fulfilling his own desires. Thus the
individual fails to realize the reality or otherness of others. In the novels of Murdoch, it is implied that goodness comes through allowing or even promoting destruction of oneself in order to prevent oneself from destroying others. Winsor opines that “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” (397). By curbing the urges, desires and evil tendencies which are inherent in him it is impossible for the common man to attain freedom.

The characters in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* are free individuals caught up in a world of incessant change. All of Murdoch’s characters are unique moral agents, deciding their own actions and working out their own destiny. Their acts and responses point to the fact that people can tolerate very little reality. They clutch therefore to fixed images of themselves, of their past, of others and embrace routines, conventions and clichés. The novel dramatizes the void between one’s self-enclosed vision and the immense network of relationships in which one is engrossed. Murdoch views, “human relationship is no doubt the most important, as well as the first, training and testing ground of morality” (“Metaphysics” 17). If human beings fail to maintain a good relationship with others, it provides evidence that they are puppets of their own internal drives.

Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* possesses the capacity for self-deception. Blinded by selfish aims and images, she has a focus of attention that is internal. This perception leads Morgan to regard humanity with contempt. She does not respect the individuality of others, instead she prefers to view them as objects to be used and discarded. She lives a life of fantasy. According to Eriksen, fantasy “is the construction
of false images, and is a static and inward form of consolation in the face of pointlessness and morality” (23).

Relationships between people should provide a challenge both to the egoism and the freedom of those concerned. Morgan tends to confuse her feelings and enjoys keeping a dream like stance throughout the novel. She is possessed by her own vanity and especially her illusion of the world. For Morgan, the focus of her vision is identified with the object of her desires, and the fulfillment of her own ego. In the pursuit of her own survival, she makes no attempt to see the self of others. She prefers to live in a state of fantasy.

The reason for man’s failure to achieve universal benevolence is egoism. It is a preoccupation with the self and self’s concerns. Motivated by self-interest, the characters thrive on their own self-image, because their ideas and relationship with one another are not tested in any way or subjected to any critical doubt. Morgan’s ordeal is the difficult search for selfhood. Her central struggle is to learn, to know and to love her true self. She mistakenly believes that she can attain this through suffering and submission. The more she seeks validation, the more she becomes alienated from herself. In her egoism, she does not see the separateness of the other. She believes that she loves others. But what she loves, and what she lets into her life, is her own image of them. Morgan is in a state of shock and utter confusion. She says, “I don’t know where I’m going. I have no plans. I have no intentions. I have no thoughts. I have just got off a jet plane and I feel crazy” (Fairly 39). These muddled emotions are the background for her actions. It also reflects the unintelligibility of the human condition of which the individual has to make some sense.
Morgan is a woman of no principles. She represents evil because whatever she does is to satisfy herself. She betrays her husband, Tallis by having sexual relationship with Julius. Her failure to respond to the pure love of Tallis, drives her to develop an extramarital relationship with Julius. She describes Tallis is like radium, because “too much exposure to him damages the tissues” (109). Both Tallis and Morgan fail to keep the relationship healthy. The distortion of unity and the unbalance of identification occur because of Tallis and his goodness. Tallis and Morgan’s marriage is a symbol of good and its failure is thus a symbol of the lack of connection between context and ideas. Morgan is never able to accept Tallis. She tells Hilda, “Tallis has got no inner life, no real conception of himself, there’s a sort of emptiness” (48). As they are no longer bound to each other, she becomes foreign to him.

Morgan’s search for identity coexists with her search for a story of her life. She says, “I want to live my own life, out in the open, outside the rat race, outside the capitalist dream” (59). At present her life is in a jumble of fragmented experience and does not have a meaning. Morgan knows that she is deeply frustrated and not capable of creating a coherent story of her life. She is egocentric and believes that she can love others, but she misconceives love. Love is something that should be selfless as it does not actually have anything to do with oneself.

Morgan is deeply attracted to Julius and does not want to give him up. When she is rejected by Julius, she begs him to love and accept her. For her, Julius “is almost all myth” (48). He is very harsh and dismissive towards her. She is deeply and disturbingly chaotic, because she fails to perceive reality clearly of wearing upon veil which obscure
the truth of selfhood. She is hurt by Julius’s rejection of her. She is perplexed and obsessed by her own vanity.

Rupert - Morgan love affair is fundamentally self-enchancing and arises from vanity. Rupert is Hilda’s husband. In response to Morgan’s faith in the strength of love, Julius tells her that he is able to split up any relationship at will. However Julius turns his game against Morgan as well. Julius steals letters written by Rupert to Hilda, and sends them to Morgan. Like that he sends letters written by Morgan to him to Rupert. Thus both believe that they are in love. Their vanity leads them to imagine that they are in love with each other.

Morgan is often seen behaving lovingly and she will later betray. After exciting Peter’s passions, she says, “We’ll love each other, innocently, with a happy love” (171). Her understanding of love is self-centred and she operates it when she feels happy. She forces Rupert to keep in secret her new relationship with him. She herself tells lies and also forces Rupert to tell lies to Hilda. When her supposed love affair with Rupert starts, she forgets the interests of both her nephew Peter and her sister Hilda. Thus Morgan’s concept of love is flawed and self-centred. She hopes that she loves everybody, but her concept of love is directed only on herself.

Morgan undertakes both internal and external quest for selfhood, identity and morality. For Murdoch, the fact that morality has to do with a discerning consciousness means that one as a human being must be free. Freedom is to see and truly attend to reality as it is, and to avoid the unconscious veil of consolation. Murdoch builds upon this fairly dissatisfying conception of a free will-determinism mixed by taking influence from
Simone Weil. The characteristic mark of the active moral agent is moral vision. Weil sees it as consisting of suspending one’s thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object. Weil explains:

It means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thought; as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it. (49)

Morgan’s problem is that she searches for her real self, without understanding that she is her real self. The direction of her search is inwards that she will never find. If she wants to see herself, she has to accept her confusion and must focus her attention other than herself.

Murdoch’s characters are completely devoid of the idea of love and they view others either as obstacles or as means to their own selfish ends. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* provides a pessimistic view of morality and of human life. Morgan represents the human soul. Her search for self is driven by an anxiety of being nothing. Nussbaum points out, “egoistic anxiety is the root of all the vices” (44). The dominance of the theme of love in the novel is indicative of its importance to the moral vision. The ideal love
called for by Murdoch is similar in nature to the Christian ethic revealed by St. Paul in the *Holy Bible*:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1Cor. 13: 4-7)

The achievement of love thus depends not upon contemplating the world with the limited vision enforced by isolation, but in directing one’s vision outward by immersing oneself in the world’s variety.

Murdoch’s background as a philosopher is obvious in her fiction, as her texts are frequently interspersed with philosophical commentary. She is an interesting writer who, despite her Post modern context, sees it as her mission to discover truth both in her fiction and philosophical writings. Her use of philosophy often gives her novels a fragmented style. Murdoch argues that art is an important source of inspiration for mankind, as it constitutes a powerful revelation of people’s inner lives. Todd opines, “human nature and the nature of art are fundamental themes in Murdoch’s novels” (74-75). Art and ethics are inseparable in Murdoch’s writing. Philosophical and literary discourse is inseparable in her writing as it manifests the principle of going beyond the self. Such direct philosophical interpretation is particularly prominent in *The Black Prince*. It’s primary themes are the possibility of glimpsing eternal truth through the experience of erotic love and the possibility of presenting truth through the creation of
art. As Murdoch is a Platonist, she believes, like Plato that people go through life with only a limited sense of truth since one’s everyday world is a world of illusion.

Bradley Pearson, the main character of *The Black Prince* is guided by a tendency towards self-preservation. He is a typical self-involved Murdochian character. He identifies himself as a self-willed, self-reliant individual with an aversion to life. He is an ascetic of fifty eight years old man and lives a comfortable bachelor life in Charlotte Street. He has divorced his wife, Christian and has taken early retirement as an Inspector of Taxes. Datta asserts that “. . . years of experience in the routines of the tax office have not schooled him to understand human nature” (161). He is an ascetical and puritanical man who wants to diminish life to simple formulae and patterns. He is repelled by the muddy human involvements and liked to remain aloof. Murdoch pictures his egoistic nature as follows:

. . . want to be cut off from people. Being a real person oneself is a matter of setting up limits and drawing lines and saying no. I don’t want to be a nebulous bit of ectoplasm straying around in other people’s lives. That sort of vague sympathy with everybody precludes any real understanding of anybody. (*Prince* 48-49)

Bradley is a puritan, who doubts contingency. Conradi remarks, Bradley “is a puritan ruled by *pudeur* who fears contingency, a Platonist and monist”(191). He is gentle, timid and easily disgusted by chance encounters and sudden happenings. His chief aim in life is to become a successful writer, in order to fulfill this desire, he ignores others. His only goal is to write the book which he thinks will be his masterpiece. He
rents a cottage beside the sea, and believes that solitude, silence and an atmosphere untainted by ordinary mortals would be most conducive for creative work. When Arnold advises him to be curious about people, Bradley says that “Art comes out of endless restraint and silence” (*Prince* 50). He describes himself as a perfectionist, a worldly failure, a seeker and a devotee of silence.

In *The Black Prince* the focus is on the relationship between attention and reality. Only through paying attention and a concomitant suppression of self, one can perceive reality. Murdoch’s advocacy of selflessness thus stems from an accepting of the centrality of the self in the individual’s perception and its deluding nature as well as a particular vision of what it means to act in a moral way of one’s love for other people. She claims:

> It is a task to come to see the world as it is. A philosophy which leaves duty without a context and exalts the idea of freedom and power as a separate top level value ignores this task and obscures the relation between virtue and reality. We act rightly when the time comes not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy and discernment which we have available. (*Sovereignty* 89)

Thus Murdoch believes that self-relatedness can be counteracted only from the outside or by directing one’s attention towards another.

Being a solipsistic person, Bradley avoids mingling and interacting even with his loved ones. He fails to see and love others. He believes that loneliness helps him become a great writer. He forgets the truth that “Curiosity is a kind of charity” (*Prince* 49). Bradley, however, interprets curiosity as a malevolent form of intrusion in other people’s
lives. In his behaviour towards Francis Marloe, Christian’s brother, one can understand
the expression of his egoistic feelings. He throws him out of the flat and belittles him
before others. He exploits him whenever need arises and disregards him when he is of no
use. Bradley’s distorted moral vision never permits him to see, understand or love him.
To him, Francis is “some sort of scoundrel” (48). The same attitude can be seen in his
behaviour towards his office friends. Rachel, Arnold’s wife who searches for refuge and
support in his friendship fails to focus his attention on her. She tries to get closer to
Bradley to compensate for the pain and frustration in her marriage. Bradley often
expresses his belief that his artistic freedom is a necessity, and more important than the
love relationship with Rachel.

The greatest causality of Bradley’s solipsistic personality and insular moral vision
is his own sister Priscilla. Although she comes to him in a state of mental crisis, he
refuses to listen to her sympathetically. As her husband gets entangled with a young
beautiful girl, she is forced to leave her home. Bradley refuses to give love to his sister. In
the beginning, he neglects her because of his keen desire to escape from London. Later,
he is too immersed in his newly found love for Julian. Bradley as a brother, fails to give
love to his sister, and his lack of sympathy compels her to commit suicide by swallowing
sleeping pills. Under self-delusion, he feels that Priscilla’s death has made him free. His
behaviour projects him as a mean man, living in his own self-centered world. He does
not want to own responsibility for his sister’s death.

Bradley’s failure to deal adequately with the reality of others is also evident in his
relationship with Christian who is not the submissive type and thereby instantly becomes
a threat to Bradley’s ego. To him, she is one of the “predatory women” (81). He describes his relations with his ex-wife, Christian as follows:

At first I saw her as a life-bringer. Then I saw her as a death-bringer . . . .

Christian was certainly a natural flirt. Sheer silliness can be attractive in a woman. I was, of course, attracted. She was, I suppose, a rather ‘sexy’ woman. Some people thought me lucky. She brought, what I detest, disorder into my life. She was a great maker of scenes. In the end I detested her. (Prince 24-25)

Christian is a woman who wants to have fun in life. As Bradley is an avoider of society, he cannot remain with her for a long time. Though married to Christian he was never curious to discover that she is of Jewish background. Like Arnold, Christian also feels that a writer should gain details from outside and also by mingling with other people. She points out, “Birds can’t sing in cages” (96). Bradley’s cage is his limited, isolated, self-enclosed vision. Good art requires other-centered discipline, entailing emergence from this cage and entry into the vortex of life. Bradley in his struggle, has to understand the human contingency, otherwise he cannot understand truth and aesthetic experience runs waste.

The ideas of attention, unselfing, otherness and the real that make up Murdoch’s conception of love are presented in all her novels. Self-absorption, fantasy and illusion do not allow one to see the reality. Frankova points out, “Attention to self in order to gain self-knowledge amounts to indulging in a delusion” (70). Rachel, Priscilla and Christian crowd into Bradley’s life simultaneously, appealing for help and emotional
support. Rachel and Priscilla appeal to him from a position of helplessness whereas Christian turns to him from a position of inner strength. He attempts to get rid of them because he is incapable of dealing with other people. Bradley talks of truth but avoids facing it. He seeks solitude instead of immersion into life. His neurotic nature cuts him off from the knowledge of human affairs.

In *The Black Prince*, the novelist brings out the fact, art which precludes oddments of life like suffering, muddle and horror is not art. Art must connect itself to lived experience and reality. It cannot be created in void. Since it has its subject-matter like life, people and their experience, the creator of art must interact with others. Bradley is wrong not only about the nature of artistic inspiration and about the requirement of the artist in terms of participation and observation but also about the composition of his own erotic self. He tries to give his life a form. He claims to be a “seeker of wisdom and truth” (*Prince* 12), but he runs away not only from truth and wisdom but also from love, beauty and self-renewal. He cannot commit himself to people, places and objects. He is filled with theories of art, which he cannot produce. He cannot even produce a good racy autobiographical quasi work of art.

Murdoch’s novels attempt to convey the truth about the terrible present day human condition. She is aware of the distortions that have occurred in human relationships due to loss of religious values, break with the cultural and moral background and the selfish tendencies encouraged for mythical individual happiness. Similarly George Eliot in *Middlemarch* defines egoism as “moral stupidity” (243). Like Murdoch, Eliot’s motive is to draw her readers’ attention to human relationships and to widen their perspective. The distorted human relations have caused the breakdown of
communication and understanding among human beings. The modern man erects barriers between himself and reality to keep himself in his self-centred dream world. He judges the world through his own self deceptions. Murdoch visualizes that human beings must be directed to come out of their selfish fantasy world and must face reality.

Murdoch’s novels depict, how most of the modern men have lost touch with their feelings and are totally dependent on reason. Their reasoning habit disables them to establish real emotional bonds with other human beings. They make intricate attempts to simplify complex human relationships through their false estimates of themselves and of the situation they have to face. In fact, they see the world not as it is, but they see under the pretext of rationalization. All this results in muddled human relations and general chaos in life.

Murdoch, through her characters demonstrates how neurosis and convention control the lives of men, inhibiting their ability to be free. According to her, “the two great enemies of love are convention and neurosis” (“Sublime” 53). Her characters can be viewed in different categories like ‘Ordinary Language Man’ and ‘Totalitarian Man’ and their subjection to the power of myths. The general flaw underlying in Existentialism and Linguistic Analysis is the increased tendency towards solipsism. Existentialism reduces man to neurosis and linguistic empiricism to a series of empty conventions, which is but another kind of solipsism. Convention is the force which drives ‘Ordinary Language Man,’ who believes that moral issues are simple. They believe that these are rules and choices and an existing decorum made by a civilized society. Neurosis drives ‘Totalitarian Man’ to see the world and his life as a dramatic myth. He wants his life to have an absolute form and purpose. The ‘Totalitarian Man’s highest value is his own will
and his own assertion of his solitary self in a hostile society. Murdoch finds both these images of the human self to be inadequate because they represent the egoistic nature of man. These characters have been depicted in her works as failures. They do not gain spiritual or worldly success. The real success is gained by those who liberate themselves and accept others.

Neither the journalistic nor the crystalline novel fulfills Murdoch’s idea of fiction. The crystalline novel is too neurotic, solipsistic and deals with an isolated figure. The journalistic novel is a social epic with too little control and therefore lacks a formal creative unity. Both these novels are not concerned with the creation of free and real characters. She needs a satisfactory liberal theory of personality, which will provide a standpoint for considering real human beings in their variety. Man in her view, cannot be classified and defined, because he is unique. It is the essence of personality Murdoch sees man as “free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world” (“Dryness” 18).

For Murdoch, the form of a novel must be the form of life. She remarks, “a novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in, and to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art of prose” (“Sublime Revisited” 271). She sees the world as multifarious and always surprising, it is unlimited, continually unfolding and constantly changing. For Murdoch, a novel must present a plurality of real persons moving in an uncertain and chancy world. She believes that the way out of this dilemma is to recognize that “Concepts as well as men should enjoy the privileges of transformation” (“Mass, Might, Myth” 337). The pressing need is therefore to return from the self-centered concept of sincerity to the other-centered concept of truth
and to transform the present image of man by introducing a more satisfactory liberal theory of personality.

Murdoch criticizes Sartre for presenting the individual as “solitary and totally free” (“Dryness” 17). She perceives his view of philosophy as, “there is no transcendent reality, there are no degrees of freedom” (17). Again she is concerned with the idea that his existentialism separates the effects of contingent social habits and bias from psychological desires and the will. Modern philosophy, in general, has not been able to counter Sartre’s or the Marxist theory with any other view of man, so Murdoch turns hope towards literature. Literature must have a form which mirrors the complexity of the world. She fears that form can be used as a shield against chance rather than as an exploration which liberates.

Murdoch’s description of man’s estate in this world strikes a note of existential despair. She defines him as an accidental creature briefly adrift in a contingent universe:

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

*(Sovereignty 77)*

Murdoch insists that man is basically a social entity and it is through interaction with others, that the soundness of his moral principles can be tested. He has to be aware of the reality of other people while taking moral decisions and making choices.
In the Murdochian sense, moral freedom is not centred around choice nor an exercise of the solitary omnipotent will involves in an empty self-assertion. It is not self-centered but involves the task of knowing and understanding others. He who perceives what is real and respects the otherness of reality will act rightly. Freedom in Murdoch’s view is closely concerned with the neglected and unexplored area that constitutes the inner background. In this light, freedom is connected with the acquiring of an accurate vision to enable man to look at things and persons objectively in their opaque and irreducible individualities. The effort requires for this purpose involves a moral discipline and suppression of the self.

Taking human affairs seriously is based on Murdoch’s reading of Plato and is the best clue to her characteristic adjustments between closeness to life and intellectual detachment. Mc Ewan points out, Murdoch’s “work is concerned with human freedom in relation to this reality, and with constant tendency of the mind to deform it by fantasy, also with the moral truth” (44). For Murdoch, real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy. Her role has been to create significance despite the bare humanism of philosophy.

Degrees of freedom and love become the prime concern for Murdoch in her philosophical thesis and the centre of her literature. For her, love is the discovery of reality because love “is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real” (“Sublime” 51). Therefore love is the referent needed to find a language to give life meaning. Awareness of others leads to freedom. Her concept of freedom is posited against a dense, transcendent and intractable background of reality. In “The Darkness of Practical Reason,” Murdoch states, “to perceive what is real and to exist
sanely and without fear is to be free” (50). Art is necessary, as is love to sustain life and morality. Murdoch considers literature, as an essential instrument to contact reality, truth and freedom as part of the experience of love. She wants to avoid neurotic and egocentric fantasies and so literature can give a new vocabulary of experience, and a true picture of freedom.

In her novels, Murdoch brings to forefront the two kinds of evils that prevent the human beings from attaining reality. Through her characters, she allows the readers to realize their flaws, as they live in a state of chaos. She explains, relying on conventions and leading an orderly life is good, but at the same time, conventions will become hindrances to understand the reality of the world. The neurotic figures appear in her novels are self-centred and do not have any respect for contingency. According to Murdoch, individuals should respect contingency and should not create any forms or patterns in their lives. Man must live without illusions and fantasies and must acquire a state of mind to face life as it is. For Murdoch, the best way to overcome illusions is to love and to have concern for others. Freedom, for Murdoch is the will to overcome the egocentric fantasies.