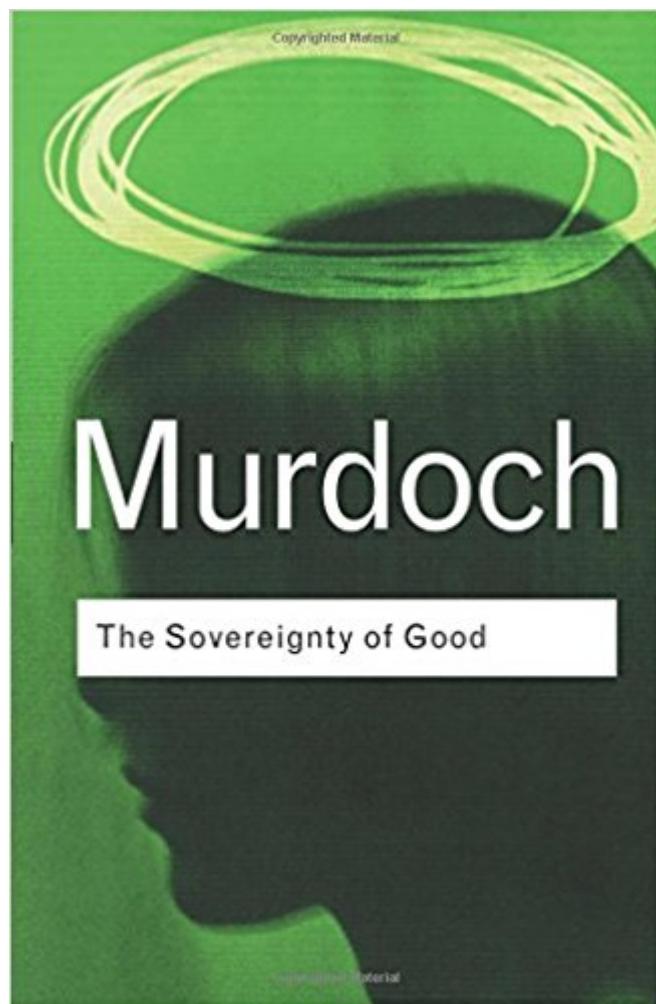


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# The Sovereignty Of Good



## Synopsis

Iris Murdoch once observed: 'philosophy is often a matter of finding occasions on which to say the obvious'. What was obvious to Murdoch, and to all those who read her work, is that Good transcends everything - even God. Throughout her distinguished and prolific writing career, she explored questions of Good and Bad, myth and morality. The framework for Murdoch's questions - and her own conclusions - can be found here.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'One of the very few modern books of philosophy which people outside academic philosophy find really useful.' - Mary Midgely '... Murdoch's attack is the fruit of a thorough professional involvement with the school of thought to which she is opposed.' - Anthony Quinton, Sunday Telegraph 'All three essays which make up this book, The Idea of Perfection, On 'God' and 'Good', and The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts, are superb.' - The Guardian

Dame Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). Irish-born British novelist and philosopher. Recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including the Booker McConnell prize and the Whitbread prize.

I read a Library copy years ago and took extensive notes. I'm pleased to have my own copy. I recommend it highly. She represents a direction in Philosophy that shows relief from the analytical strand of the 50s and 60s and still can open avenues of thought.

One of the best books I've read!

All her books are worthwhile.

While the essays in "The Sovereignty of Good" are definitely worth reading, I wish I would not have bought them in this edition. Routledge is asking \$15 for this book. I have found numerous typographical errors, which is inexcusable given that the book has been reprinted many times since 2001. Additionally, it contains no new notes or introductions. It is merely a reprinting of 1970 version of the text. Finally, the physical book just feels a bit cheap. Really, for the price and from this publisher, I expected more. I recently discovered that for just a few dollars more, I could have bought "Existentialists and Mystics" (Penguin, 2001). It contains the text of "The Sovereignty of the Good" along with nearly two dozen additional essays by Murdoch. The editors have also included explanatory notes which will be helpful for readers who have limited knowledge of mid-twentieth century philosophy. For instance, when Murdoch discusses McTaggart and Hampshire in "The Idea of Perfection", she does not offer full citations for the essays and books she references (at least such citations are not included in the Routledge reprinting). The editors of "Existentialists and Mystics" include the citations and offer brief notes about books and authors. Simple? Yes, but also time-saving. (Who wants to do a Google search in the middle of reading a good argument?) Anyway, I will be buying "Existentialists and Mystics" in short order. I'll use the Routledge either as my mark-up or lend-out copy of the text. But I recommend you save yourself the trouble and buy the right book the first time.

it did its job. I did my homework while learning a couple things along the way. great book no damages and easy to read

Arrived punctually - and shrink-wrapped for shipping. What more can one expect.

In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch suggests that "God was (or is) a single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention." This beautifully complex definition is intentionally devoid of commas, thus preventing any inference of a ranked list of qualities. Murdoch's definition captures the truth that any spiritual experience of the transcendent is beyond reason, categorization, or logical systems. God, which is for Murdoch an indefinable Platonic form of Good, is sensed by our "highest nature" (our morality), and not our intellect. Following Plato,

Murdoch uses Beauty as an entry point into the examination of Good. Natural beauty and pure expressions of art draw our attention so completely away from considerations of self that the observer becomes selfless. Humility, which is both rare and unfashionable, is the highest human mode of selfless attention. The humble man, true scholar, and great artist share an ability to "unself." By directing their attention to a specific object, they see reality untainted by the psyche's protective mechanisms. Murdoch is quick to point out that "unselfing" doesn't necessarily equate to the person acting and deciding in ways that lead towards Good. The scholar may be a brilliant ass, and the artist a self-centered bore. Of the three who share in the gift of "unselfing," the humble man has the best chance of becoming Good. Thus viewed, morality doesn't reduce to either a series of value words or the nihilism of Kantian angst. Morality in Murdoch's argument is active and real. Not only is morality the proper focus of philosophy, but philosophers could learn from the "humble peasant." Murdoch argues that philosophy should encapsulate and transmit a theory of Good, and the academic means to attain morality. However, she warns that philosophy alone cannot fully transmit a functional guide for how to become Good. Hereby Murdoch makes a wonderful boast, and rattles the golden cages of Science and Logic. She says, "art thenÃ¢â€šâ€œ is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be seen." Art, and especially literature, are "Goodness by proxy" and thereby able to instruct and guide the unruly ego. Great art sneaks past the psyche and into the soul, illuminating it with the light of reality as surely as the men in Plato's cave allegory saw the sun. Metaphor and story are spiritual tools. That Murdoch believed and lived by this view of story is evident in her vast oeuvre of fiction. She weaves entrancing morality tales that teach readers who are humble enough to pay attention. If you are a fan of Iris Murdoch's fiction and would like to peer into the mystical wellspring from which they come, read the *Sovereignty of Good*.

This review concerns the physical quality of the book, not the essays themselves. The Paperback edition is actually a "print-on-demand" book, which means it's printed and bound after you order it. This is apparent in some uneven color on the colors, slightly misaligned graphics, and a general feel that is less professional than standard Routledge books. Personally, if I had known this I would have opted for the similarly priced Penguin edition mentioned by another user.

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