

## Kestrels and Storks: A Defence of Murdoch's 'Self-Deluding' Faith in the Sovereignty of Good

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This new paper seeks to explicate, clarify, and to a certain extent defend Iris Murdoch's notorious and fundamental keystone belief in the sovereignty of *goodness*, and discuss her considered, consistent reverence for goodness over 'God'. Here, I address and examine the 'sovereignty of good' as a concept, rather than analyze and decode the important book of that name, though it is, of course, expedient and necessary to refer in some detail to that work, in order to extract some basic points of Murdoch's intellectual position in this area.

Simultaneously, I endeavour here to demonstrate that Murdoch's championing of this relatively down-to-earth, commonsensical, Zen-inspired, and very humanistic worldview was, of its time — the 1970s: heyday of linguistic gymnastics and semiotics — both controversial and challenging. I suspect (in fact, I am certain) that Murdoch knew this, and this fact might well have considerably strengthened her resolve to nail her colours to the mast of such a philosophical flagship throughout her long career as a multi-faceted writer of novels, philosophical essays, and verse. I offer evidence for this opinion too.

Murdoch's philosophy of good remains controversial today, regarded as naïve and overly simplistic by a number of seemingly insecure, rather supercilious philosophers deemed to be more 'professional' than Murdoch was and still is (I think unfairly) supposed to be. In this paper, I specifically address the forthright criticisms of the 'self-

deluding' Murdochian vision made by the former Oxford don John Carey in his (otherwise excellent and imminently readable) study, *What Good Are The Arts?* (2005). I do so firstly by reference to Murdoch's own philosophical works (particularly *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970)), and then by analyzing 'John Sees A Stork At Zamorra', a fascinating and (like her philosophy) deceptively-simple short poem of Murdoch's, which can be found in my own and Professor Yozo Muroya's authorized *Poems by Iris Murdoch* (1997).

Only recently, Professor Kieran Setiya, ethics and epistemology specialist in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT, has thrown down a gauntlet, stating that: 'If Murdoch is to speak more audibly . . . so that she cannot be ignored, her ideas must be reframed as interventions in existing disputes, her arguments must be recovered, and her conclusions made clear. With notable exceptions, few have taken up this task; there is a lot to be done.' I have decided to pick up that gauntlet, and I take up that task in this paper, attempting to do something good along the way.