CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GOOD AND EVIL

This chapter deals with the narrative aspects of good and evil in nine of Iris Murdoch's works, ranging from The Bell (1958) to The Message to the Planet (1989). The novels are religious in effect but they never succumb to the warm fuzziness of consoling or salvational piety. Great mystics are involved especially Julian of Norwich and St. John of the Cross and even Christ makes an appearance in one novel Nuns and Soldiers (1980). However, the real direction of the fiction works through the characters of the workaday world always employed as its basis by realism.

It would, therefore, be appropriate to elucidate upon Murdoch's concern, namely, that of the ethics of good and evil from a Murdochian point of view. The previous chapter had conveyed, in detail, these aspects from a Christian, theological perspective and this chapter discusses the same code of ethics from the author's point of view. In her work The Fire and The Sun (1977) Murdoch pointed out that the main problem with religion is that it materializes God and even her own characters long for such materialization of the ideals that govern their own lives. In The Sovereignty of Good (1970)
Murdoch ponders over these questions: “what is a good man like? How can we make ourselves morally better? Can we make ourselves morally better?” She feels that these are queries every philosopher should try to answer. The fact is, that “we know little about good men” even though there have been men in history who are traditionally thought of as good - namely Christ, Socrates, and because they are so few in number goodness appears to be both rare and hard to picture. On the aspect of good, Murdoch says that “it is transcendent and it becomes the focus of attention when an intention to be virtuous co-exists with some lack of clarity of vision. The good (which Murdoch spells with a capital ‘G’) itself is not visible. In her philosophy, Murdoch seems to deviate from Christian thinking. She feels that Christian theology represents goodness as “almost impossibly difficult and sin as almost inseparable and certainly as a universal condition”.

She continues to state that all is vanity and there is no respectable, intellectual way of protecting people from despair. For her “the world just is hopelessly evil”. Murdoch feels that when one speaks of good in this portentous manner, it simply amounts to speaking of the old concept of God in a thin disguise. She feels that “at least God could play a real consoling and encouraging role”. However, it makes ‘very little sense to speak of loving good, a

2 As expressed by Iris Murdoch in The Sovereignty of Good.
concept' and that 'one is afraid that the attempt to be good may turn out to be meaningless, or at best something vague, and not very important'. With regard to the status of her argument Murdoch states that if one does not believe in a personal God there is no problem of evil but there is the almost inseparable difficulty of looking properly at evil and human suffering. For Murdoch the image of the good as a transcendent magnetic centre seems to be 'the least corruptible and most realistic picture for us to use in our reflections upon the moral life'.

In an essay 'The sovereignty of good over other concepts' Murdoch states that ethics should not merely be an analysis of ordinary, mediocre conduct but that it should be a hypothesis about good conduct and about how this can be achieved. She states 'we see differences, we sense directions and we know that the good is still somewhere beyond'. Good has often been said to be indefinable, but Murdoch maintains that we do know something about good and about the way in which it is connected with our condition. She is convinced about the fact that 'the ordinary person does not, unless corrupted by philosophy, believe that he creates values by his choices. We are not usually in doubt about the direction 'in which good lies' and she further emphasizes 'equally we recognize the real existence of evil -

3 These essays are included in Murdoch's seminal work The Sovereignty of Good.
cynicism, cruelty, indifference to suffering." Though we see the world in the light of the good, the good itself remains an enigma. She feels 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.

In her writings and especially in the fiction selected for study in this thesis Murdoch attempts to "try to invent, to work through our nature against our nature". The goal is spiritual discernment; the enemy, debasement of the religious task, in doing so; Murdoch never presents the ideal end but "concentrates rather on a real and stringent depiction of the errors and resultant causality which rules human affairs under the aegis of chance":

She makes it clear that art itself has a moral base and that its real function, apart from enjoyment is, truth telling. Elizabeth Dipple's study of Murdoch's texts analyses the concern about how the books "deny and exclude the satisfaction and consolation that would come from the possibility of the existence of the broad and splendid general thing rather

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4 Murdoch's views have been expressed here in great detail, in order to comprehend her stand on the ethics of good and evil.


than the limited particular”. Murdoch’s characters are not allowed transcendence and their seeking of an ideal end is always brutally smashed, but they do know about virtue or holiness and the best way of describing this is through the ideal of good. Refusing manifestations of the divine, Murdoch nevertheless operates ironically within a limited idea of a theurgic universe where the idea of the good, which must be sought in a stringent way without hope of reward, is seen as the basic human access to the spiritual life.

The austerity of this primary group of good characters is almost hidden behind the crowded forefront of Murdoch’s novels. The surface of the books thus tends towards an unnerving “duality of ironic, comedic entertainment on the one hand, and the dark, stringent possibility of an unnameable good on the other”;8. One can safely state that almost all of Murdoch’s characters are auto reflexive and this is partly because of their modern conditioning and, thus, they are unable to fulfil the demanding requirements of the good. Thus, the formative requirement of the idea of the good remains in the background but with its power firmly intact. As a thinker, Murdoch is firmly opposed to “auto reflexivity or egocentricity

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8 Ibid, p.36.
which she sees as the motive force behind multi form confusion and human failures\(^9\), yet this dominant psychological mode is directly equivalent to the concept of autonomy for the characters in the novel which she so admires. The ideological resting place of her fiction is permanently fixed on an imageless good which she is prone to identify either with Plato or with the mystical ‘via negativa’ of St. John of the Cross. Running contrary to this is her adherence to open autonomy of character and action, “an autonomy central to her realist commitment and to the creation of complex characters, images, action, excitement and the proliferation of complications”\(^10\).

Murdoch writes to tell what she sees in the sophisticated bourgeois society she knows so well, her revelation is brave, even audacious, venturing into areas we fight to avoid.

In *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), which as defined earlier is a collection of three related philosophical essays, Murdoch argues against Stuart Hampshire and the school of contemporary British empiricists and linguistic philosophers putting forward the Platonic idea of the inner activity of man which should be and often is directed towards the externals namely, the good, God or lesser concrete universals, rather than the dazzling self and


\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 48.
its will. For Murdoch, the positive pole dominates and the defeat of good by evil - a fairly honorable defeat as she ironically calls it - is almost commonplace. Yet, the yearning towards the good and its power over the often discriminating imagination of the character when it occurs give it a primacy in Murdoch’s world that makes its assertion crucial to our feeling about the novels. One of the aspect of continuous unravelling in Murdoch’s novels is her “concentration on ways of talking about and revealing the good, the perception of the true, and reality,”[11] these three are closely synonymous. The contrast between good and evil, abstract ideas given a local habitation in the novels means that moral matter is constantly present, but without solution or ease and certainly uncomfortable in a mirror image of the secular, contemporary world. Perhaps the best way of seeing the problems in detail is to move from a concentration on the gnosis of the characters of conscious good to the peculiar difficulties Murdoch encounters in handling characters of unconscious good, and to contrast these with the evil, so startlingly and powerfully depicted in some of her novels.

It is symptomatic of Murdoch’s characters of the good that either they are structureless themselves or they renounce conventional structures or organised images. It rapidly becomes clear that there are no formulae for

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grasping the good, although disciplines like single minded devotion to study, on religion, in some instances Christianity, can, if used correctly help. It is just to call Murdoch a religious writer in a way that past traditions of our culture would recognise but "whereas Chaucer, Spenser, Richardson or even Eliot knew that they were placing their theologically inclined characters against an inaccessible background"\(^{12}\) and none are generally available now, the task of the religious writer is to describe what we have and to point in a certain direction. This task has led Murdoch to the creation of her characters of good, but as the middle life must be her realistic concentration, it is useful to see how she projects religions. Her characters talk of the loss of religious cultures over and over again. They face the 'death of God syndrome' and frequently blame their failures and frustrations on the withdrawal of the idea of a personal God who used to look after things, from the surface behaviour to the deep level of being. Many characters in Murdoch's novels long for innocence and use the term 'saint' as a talismatic device for their thinking about a perfection of the self which, they feel is largely impossible. This talismatic image of the saint tends to be historical and hallowed as a distant religious object. Murdoch clarifies that to lose the concept of God, as the adolescent generation in the novels has generally done, is not the answer. Murdoch points out that these beings point out the network of what she

deems as 'evil' and that the disappearance of the central idea only exacerbates their confusion, and she emphasises that the world of the future in their ignorant hands can only lead to even more self-centred and communally unworkable systems.

Murdoch has stressed the thematic portrayals of the ethics of good and evil. They differ in outlook but share the same ethical concern. This chapter focuses on the characters of good and evil in relation to the environment around them. The first of the novels selected for study is The Bell (1958) Michael Meade in the novel is the head of a lay religious community at Imber Court in Gloucestershire. He had always felt himself to be a man of God, with a definite destiny, a man waiting for a call. He had always held the view that "a good man is without power... It was in this sense that he understood... his call to the priesthood."\(^{13}\) For him, the service of God meant a loss of personality, but at the same time he was also aware that one of the most good people that he knew was also one of the most powerful -- the Abbess. He had always wanted to be a priest but his good intentions had been thwarted. He had been seduced at the age of fourteen and had had two homosexual affairs, while still at school. As a sixth form master, he fell in love with Nick Fawley, a fourteen year old. Murdoch narrates "he ceased

going to communion -- he felt strangely no guilt, only a hard determination
to hold to the beloved object, and to hold to it before god, accepting the cost,
whatever it might be, and in the end somehow, justifying his love.”14 Nick
reported the matter and Meade was never ordained. He was found “guilty of
that worst of offences, corrupting the young: an offence, so grievous that
Christ Himself had said that it were better for a man to have a millstone
hanged about his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea”.15

Pondering over the dilemma, Meade asked himself “could one
recognize refinements of evil”?16 He concluded provisionally that what “was
required of one was to be good, a task which usually presented a singularly
simple though steep face, and not to recognize its refinements.”17 Meade
finds a soul mate in the Catholic priest Cato in the novel Henry and Cato
(1976). Cato desperately wants to do good in life and had retired as it were
from the mainstream, but he struggles with a crisis of faith and his love for
Beautiful Joe, a vicious delinquent. Joe represented the evil over which the

15 Ibid., p.107.
16 Ibid., p.117.
17 Ibid., p. 117.
good in Cato had to triumph. Cato fails to do so. He was willing to, and eventually does give up his Christ, and his cassock.

Murdoch's characters of good are usually depicted as humble, to the point of being servile and almost awkward and clumsy. To cite a few instances Cato, in *Henry and Cato* is a very clumsy priest who chides himself harshly for his stupidity. He's introduced as a person for whom life had consisted of "one blunder after another and now aged thirty one he was well on into the stupidest of all".¹⁸ Cato lived as it were in filthy surroundings, his room was dingy and shabby and smelt of damp tobacco and the lavatory next door. He was tall, stout, often called Fat Face Forbes, Funny Face Forbes or Old Pudgie. Evil on the other hand was beautiful to the point of being irresistible as in Joe or Beautiful Joe who with his strands of long hair, looked like a young American scholar or a very clever school girl whom Cato was desperately in love with. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) Tallis Brown is the good man, and in keeping with the Murdochean element is not in the least impressive. He was always pale, tired and dirty with uncombed hair and shapeless, stained, crumpled, ill fitting clothes. Julius King, the evil counterpart is meticulously neat and attractive. Men lived in awe of him and women fawned over him - Gildas

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Heme in *The Message to the Planet* (1989) is the ex-priest who loathes Marcus Vallar the evil counterpart. While Marcus is adored and worshipped, Gildas lived in a nondescript manner, amidst chaos in a small flat that smelt of ancient things. He was not a successful man and Murdoch states that he had lost his choir and after being ordained an Anglican priest, he had lost his faith, while others around him had made successes of their lives. Gildas is in keeping with Murdoch’s ‘good’ characters, a physical wreck. He was “very thin, and not exactly deformed but twisted, his nose crooked, his head inches to his shoulder, his hands... seeming to be put on back to front”. He was ill shaven, wrinkled, his head was small and was like Murdoch states “the one who stood in corners and watched”. Vallar on the other hand was a great mathematical genius, who had to be king or nothing. He was very good looking often compared to a renaissance prince. Extremely dignified, Marcus did not suffer fools gladly, and many students became frightened of him and said he had the ‘evil eye.’ Similarly in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* (1983) and *Nuns and Soldiers*(1980) the figures of good, William Eastcote and Anne have been given little importance and where they have been mentioned, they are at a loss as to how to adjust in the outside world.

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Pitted against the rest of the world, the figures of good are a pathetic lot. Michael Meade’s religious ambitions had been shattered, due to his homosexual tendencies and his lay religious community had to be dissolved due to certain complications. Nick Fawley, the boy he had fallen in love with, committed suicide, and though Michael went and told the Abbess everything it was too late. In the end all the good that he tried to do seemed to be naught, and Murdoch states that “Michael had concerned himself with keeping his own hands clean, his own future secure, when instead he should have opened his heart”\(^\text{20}\) In the meantime, Catherine, Nick’s twin had fallen in love with him and Michael pitied her, and knew that till the end of his life “he would be concerned with her and responsible for her welfare. Nick was gone, and to perfect his suffering Catherine remained”\(^\text{21}\) Meanwhile, yet another good protagonist is unable to hold his own. “Poor old Tallis often thinks he can help people but really he’s hopelessly incompetent”\(^\text{22}\) is how Tallis Brown is described in \textit{A Fairly Honourable Defeat}. Tallis was also dreadfully untidy and lived in a house that was littered with filthy junk of every sort, it even smelt like the zoo, but Tallis never seemed to notice. Julius King is in sharp contrast, good looking and compared to him Morgan,


\(^{21}\) Ibid.,

Tallis' estranged wife, felt Tallis was a runt. She says "in some ways Tallis is a sick man. Tallis has got no inner life, real conception of himself there's a sort of emptiness. Julius is so open and so clear and yet he's mysterious and exciting too..." Tallis on his own tries to do good in his own unassuming way, and "sometimes he wished for that catastrophe, wished that someone would come and just cart him away. Yet he knew his own toughness and knew that in all probability while he lived the muddle would simply go on and on and on". Tallis is also inarticulate and so when he tries to explain to his ward that stealing is bad, he is unable to explain why. He is only able to tell him that it was wrong, Peter demands to know what it means to be wrong but he is unable to explain further. It left him with an aching, unsatisfied desire, right and wrong to him were as shadowy bats. Even his own father has no love lost for him and he tells him, "the idea of you teaching anybody is a laugh... I don't know what I did to deserve such a son". Yet Tallis continues to live life as best as he can and at the end, even though Morgan never returns to Tallis he simply let her continue to occupy his heart.

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24 Ibid., p. 60.
25 Ibid., p. 31.
In continuation Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* was a Catholic priest who had in John Forbes an agnostic father who told him ‘there is no God John, not like they think.’ Yet, Cato felt that “one must keep hope and sense in one’s life and go on striving... He could still do plenty of good in the world...”\(^{26}\) What Cato actually did in the mission was not converting people but just welfare work. In the process he often wondered upon the question of ethics and suffering. He thought “supposing one lacked the concept of suffering... supposing one just suffered like an animal without thinking all the time: I’m suffering, Is it a sophisticated concept? He was not sure. Christianity hands it out even to the peasants. Christ suffered, that is the whole point but what a pointless point!”\(^{27}\) Often defeated, Cato felt that “there was no God and the whole world was damned and everyone had quietly gone mad only they were carrying on as usual”.\(^{28}\) On his own he did try to convince Mrs Beckett, Joe’s mother to attend Church, and told her that the way and the hope was Christ. Towards the end, Cato discovered that he had lost both Christ and Joe and he wanted to repent before God. When Cato went back home to Laxlinden his father was delighted, he had always been against the order and he told Cato then “I abominate that bloody


\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 111.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
religion. It’s got the cunning of the devil in it. Wherever it flourishes it kills
honesty and thought and freedom".29 Cato ends up killing Joe, because he
had tried to rape Colette. Cato at the finale is disillusioned and bitter and he
stated that “morality is nothing but self-esteem, nothing else, simply
affectations of virtue and spiritual charm”.30

On the other hand, in the same novel there exists the all embracing
colorful character in father Brendan Craddock, someone Cato always turned to for
guidance. Brendan told Cato that he had the advantage of growing up with a
saint -- his mother “she was the sort of saint that no one ever notices or sees,
she was almost invisible”.31 This is a typically Murdochean concept.
Brendan assures Cato that God existed. He tells him “where the images end
you fall into the abyss, but it is the abyss of faith. When you have nothing
left you have nothing left but hope”.32 Cato felt that Christ cheated death by
suffering but Brendan told him that he had to continue to hold onto Christ.

In Nuns and Soldiers Anne is the nun who has been enclosed in the religious
order for fifteen years. She had left both the Church, and the order and had

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 394.
32 Ibid., p. 395.
come back to the world. She became for Guy and Gertrude Openshaw a
care giver, providing concern and sympathy as Guy is dying of cancer. It
was extremely difficult for Anne to come to terms with a lot of things.
Murdoch describes “she did not think clearly of ‘goodness’ or ‘holiness’ as a
visible goal. She believed fervently in a personal God -- a personal savior”.
She felt both the distance and the reality of the magnetic bond that
compelled her to him”.33 The idea of holiness of becoming good in some
more positive sense gained power in her mind – “Holiness not cleverness
was the path. But the path, somewhat after it became real to her as a sense
of direction, began to fill Anne with strange doubts... her instincts and
intuitions had begun quietly to point her back towards her earlier and
simpler objectives, simplicity, innocence, a kind of negative humility which
did not aspire to the name of goodness”.34

Anne’s exit from the convent had not been due to medical or mental
imbalance. She had been one of the strong ones. She had been told to
empty herself, of ‘not I but Christ’ but gradually the doubts crept in. Anne
had learnt to live with the passion of Christ, with the mystery of that
supreme pain within which He also judged the world. Yet at the same time

34 Ibid.,
she felt a profound urgent notion to move away to some place, as if it was required of her to abandon what had been achieved and to start all over again. Anne wondered to herself "can anyone who has once had it really give up the concept of God?... She could not rid herself of the experience of God's love, and the sense that only through God could she reach the world. She was soaked in Christianity, and in Christ sunk, saturated stained indelibly all through... Could she live now by the ontological proof alone"?35 When Guy Openshaw asked her why she left, she told him that she had changed her views on religion and that she wanted to make a new faith for herself, in the world outside. She didn't believe in a personal God; Christ came to Anne in a vision in the kitchen of the Openshaw home. He told her that his wounds were imaginary -- and that if there was suffering it had gone and was nothing. The suffering which Anne longed for was dismissed by Christ. He tells her that she had to do everything by herself and being made good was not possible. Anne had thought of her new life and her new solitude as a sort of simple austerity, her life inside had, a continuity with her life outside but now there was for her "the pain of hell, envy, jealousy, resentment, anger, remorse, desire, the pain that leads to terrorism".36 She felt Godless than ever before, her good was her own but so was her evil.

36 Ibid., p. 309.
Her aim was to carry her Cross, her Christ to the world and she felt that "goodness was too hard to seek and too hard to understand".\textsuperscript{37} Anne wanted to do this even though she knew that her Christ lived, defeated and disappointed. Jenkin Riderhood in \textit{The Book and the Brotherhood} faces a similar dilemma. Jenkin never went to Church but he wanted religion to go on. He is the least successful of the group to which he belongs yet his friends all turn to him in times of crisis. Jenkin is drawn towards liberation theology. He is afraid that even the picture of Christ as savior of the poor in the third world may be a falsely romantic picture. He did not want mere social changes or personal changes, he first wants to do good but does not know how. Jenkin is hit by a bullet meant for someone else and he dies. Levquist, an old teacher of theirs at Oxford, had once stated "Riderhood doesn't need to get anywhere, he walks the path, he exists where he is". And yet it was only Levquist who seemed to recognize this. Jenkin has a very nominal part in the novel, hardly any dialogue has been given to him yet he comes in for a lot of criticism. Lily Boyne had stated "Riderhood is a wet, he's a teddy bear man"\textsuperscript{38} and they all felt that he was complacent and had not got anywhere.


Stuart Cuno in *The Good Apprentice* was a graduate student with maths honors. He left his coveted teaching post at a London college in order to do social work. Cuno did not believe in God. “He wanted to be like Job, always in the wrong before God, only he had to do it without God”. Cuno took the idea of being good and being perfect very seriously. His father Harry Cuno was enraged and upset with this decision. He told Stuart that a religious man had to have an object and he hadn’t one. Stuart was also a pathetic figure even physically, Murdoch denotes that he was robust, clumsy with a “large pale face... someone had once likened Stuart to a plump white grub with a big head emerging from an apple”. As like the other characters of good, Stuart finds no support whatsoever from anyone. Yet he persists, he tells his troubled brother Edward to “find something good somewhere anywhere keep it close to you” and later “don’t hate.. keep your intent pure... quietness is good” and even “find something good anywhere and hang on to it... try to sort of pray say, deliver me from evil...” Stuart had long known that life was about salvation and had known for sometime that it

41 Ibid., p. 45.
42 Ibid., p. 47.
43 Ibid., p. 47.
was his destiny to live alone as a priest in a world without God. His rejection of God had gone back into his childhood. For Stuart, Christ was “a pure essence... something alive; and he himself was Christ”.44 For him the phrase ‘not I but Christ’ was interchangeable with ‘not Christ but I’ Cuno wanted to be a place of peace to others and he wanted to be invisible in order to heal the world. Yet on his own he knew that he embarrassed people, lacked charm but he also knew that Christ had been mocked as well. He didn’t want God, but good. He wanted to teach little children. He wanted things to be got right at the very start. He said “you can teach moral values, you can teach meditations what used to be called prayer and give them an idea of what goodness is, and how to love it...”.45

Evil has also been epitomized in her novels. It is this evil that causes many of the do gooders to stumble and fall; for evil is always so much more attractive, and in The Time of the Angels (1966) the novelist’s main aim seems to be the portrayal of the brilliance of evil. The focus of the novel is upon Carel Fisher, a priest who had gone astray. The bishop of the neighbouring Church tries to reflect upon the breakdown of ethics and he states “we live in an interregnum where the idea of a personal god must be

45 Ibid.
replaced by a danker, deeper spiritual concept... our symbolism must change.. it is a time of trial... what measures a man as a spiritual being is not his conventional goodness and badness but the genuineness of his hunger for God”.46 In the novel Marcus another character, is busy writing a novel entitled ‘morality in a world without god’ Carel Fisher is at the very heart of the undoing of the Christian centuries. He states “if there is a goodness it must be one multiplicity, is not a paganism, it is the triumph of evil, or rather what used to be called evil and is now nameless. The death of god has set the angels free, and they are terrible... god was at least the name of which we thought was good. Now even the name has gone and the spiritual world is scattered”.47

The metaphysical world Carel describes and inhabits is one in which the breaking of unity releases chaos and old night, in which we face a truth which is purely horrible evil. He used images where the human spirit is involved with evil literally. Carel states “suppose only evil were real, only it was not evil since it had lost even its name? Who could face this? The philosophers have even tried... philosophers are simply the advance guard of theology. They are certain that goodness is there in the centre of things

47 Ibid., p. 186.
radiating its pattern... Job asks for sense and justice. Jehovah replies that there is none. There is only power and the marvel of power, there is only chance and the terror of chance and if there is only this there is no god, and the single good of the philosophers is an illusion and a fake". Murdoch herself has stated ceaselessly that her characters are good for nothing. Carel continues "people will endlessly conceal from themselves that good is only good if one is good for nothing the whole history of philosophy, is an act of concealment. One must be good for nothing... and that is why goodness is impossible for us human beings. It is not only impossible, it is not even imaginable we cannot really name it, in our relation it is non-existent. The concept is empty... this has been said of the concept of God. It is even more true of the concept of good... with or without the illusion of God, goodness is impossible to us, we have been made too low in the order of things. God made it impossible that there should be true saints". He then steps madly into the role of god. In a world without God, Carel’s choice is to remain a priest and waits for it all to finish. He is Murdoch’s first large allegory in which a character interprets and enacts the role of God. When the characters of good in Murdoch’s fiction direct themselves towards the futile aim of good, Carel’s is a demonic turning of this idea. He also carries on a love


49 Ibid., p. 68.
affair with his daughter Elizabeth and his black maid Pattie. And through all this he saw himself as God possessing both black and white.

While Carel Fisher epitomises the very evil, there are other protagonists who continually stand in the way of good. Tallis Brown's attempts at being good were constantly thwarted in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Hilda, an acquaintance echoed many a sentiment when she stated of him, “his activities are all so wet and dilettante and disconnected. All that bitty adult education and dribs and drabs of social work and nothing ever achieved or finished. There's something feeble about it". Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* felt that he had to go on doing good, especially for Joe because he felt Joe needed love “pure love can cure evil ultimately nothing else can”. Marcus Vallar in *The Message to the Planet* had roughed up Gildas Herne. He had pointed out that Gildas as an intelligent, rational man, could not believe in the old personal God or the divinity of Christ. He told Gildas that he was a deceiver, a charlatan, a false priest and very soon after Gildas left the Church. Marcus was regarded by many to be a demon, beyond good and evil. In *The Philosopher's Pupil* George McCaffrey is the evil persona who continually quarreled with his wife Stella and wants to kill

her. George had “the capacity to introduce absolute disorder into all their lives”. 52 He wanted to destroy everyone. “He had fantasies, or were they dreams, of drowning someone, as it might be Stella and burying the corpse into the wood and visiting the quiet game regularly”. 53 Even in this novel, the good protagonist William Eastcote is very marginalised. He preaches “Let us love the close things, close clear good things, and hope that in their light other goods may be added. Let us make it a practice to banish evil thoughts... like people in the olden days who felt they were defeating Satan. Let us then seek aid in pure things, training our minds to good people to the pure words of Christ in the gospel”. 54

As analysed in this chapter Murdoch’s concern with Christianity takes on a greater emphasis with what she sees as a contemporary need for a religion “one without a God for a new Christianity, centred on the acceptance of a mythical Christ who is the goodness of the good man”. 55 This differs a great deal from mainstream Christianity, as denoted in an earlier chapter where the focus upon good is vested upon God as the source

53 Ibid.,
54 Ibid., pp. 204-205.
of good. The essential difference between Murdoch's religious philosophy and Christianity is that the former places emphasis on man and the latter on man working in accordance with the spirit of God. With regard to the evil in Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* which is truly satanic, the enraging success of the character comes not only from the complete sense of evil in him, but also from his charm and glamour. Elizabeth Dipple states "hovering behind the Tallis-Julius relationship is a curious, entirely non-realist suggestion that the competition of Christ versus Satan is merely being played out again in another version". 56 Julius had also pointed out that the good figure was dull - "what novelist ever succeeded in making a good man interesting? ... what passes for human goodness is in reality a tiny phenomenon, messy, limited, truncated and as I say dull". 57 Tallis very nearly wins, Julius had stated "if there were a just judge I would kiss his feet and accept his punishment upon my knees". 58 He is very certain that no such judge exists but at the same time he acknowledges a peculiar subservience to Tallis. In Murdoch's world if there were a just judge it would be someone like Tallis, who can only stand and wait. In *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) Murdoch talks about the conflict between the

58 Ibid., p. 68.
good self and the bad self. "In reality the good self is very small indeed, and most of what appears good is not. The truly good is not a friendly tyrant to the bad. It is a deadly foe". 59 Brendan Craddock in *Henry and Cato* could be a very positive instance of the good man. His is "a role which declares openly to the world that it is dedicated entirely to good - the good named God". 60 For Murdoch good is located in the non 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. Brendan Craddock too, had decided to emulate his mother who was nearly 'invisible.'

Murdoch, at the end of each novel continues to conclude that good no matter how marginal it may be, continues to be sovereign. Her theology has little in common with mainline Christian theology, where perfect goodness and power are projected on a divine being. Murdoch's stress is upon the human heart and mind. How exactly is this good discovered? How does the discovery of the good within the self necessarily improve the heart morally and spiritually? The implication is that one can discover within oneself the strength to do right and love good: the good within responding to the good without. Murdoch devotes herself to the conditions of both good and evil


and in her fiction has managed to convey how her definitions have been achieved through the presence of her protagonists. Good for her continues to be sovereign, however unsatisfying this may seem. As an artist Murdoch is concerned only with the world as it is; if as a teacher she asserts the good, amidst the abundance of evil, she does so with no illusions about its efficacy and power.