

# Good Is Mysterious

By Iris Murdoch

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5 A genuine sense of mortality enables us to see virtue as the only thing of worth; and it is im-  
possible to limit and foresee the ways in which it will be required of us. That we cannot domi-  
nate the world may be put in a more positive way. Good is mysterious because of human  
frailty, because of the immense distance which is involved. If there were angels they might be  
able to define good but we would not understand the definition. We are largely mechanical  
creatures, the slaves of relentlessly strong selfish forces the nature of which we scarcely com-  
prehend. At best, as decent persons, we are usually very specialized. We behave well in areas  
10 where this can be done fairly easily and let other areas of possible virtue remain underdevel-  
oped. There are perhaps in the case of every human being insuperable psychological barriers to  
goodness. The self is a divided thing and the whole of it cannot be redeemed any more than it  
can be known. And if we look outside the self what we see are scattered intimations of Good.  
There are few places where virtue plainly shines: great art, humble people who serve others.  
And can we, without improving ourselves, really see these things clearly? It is in the context of  
15 such limitations that we should picture our freedom.