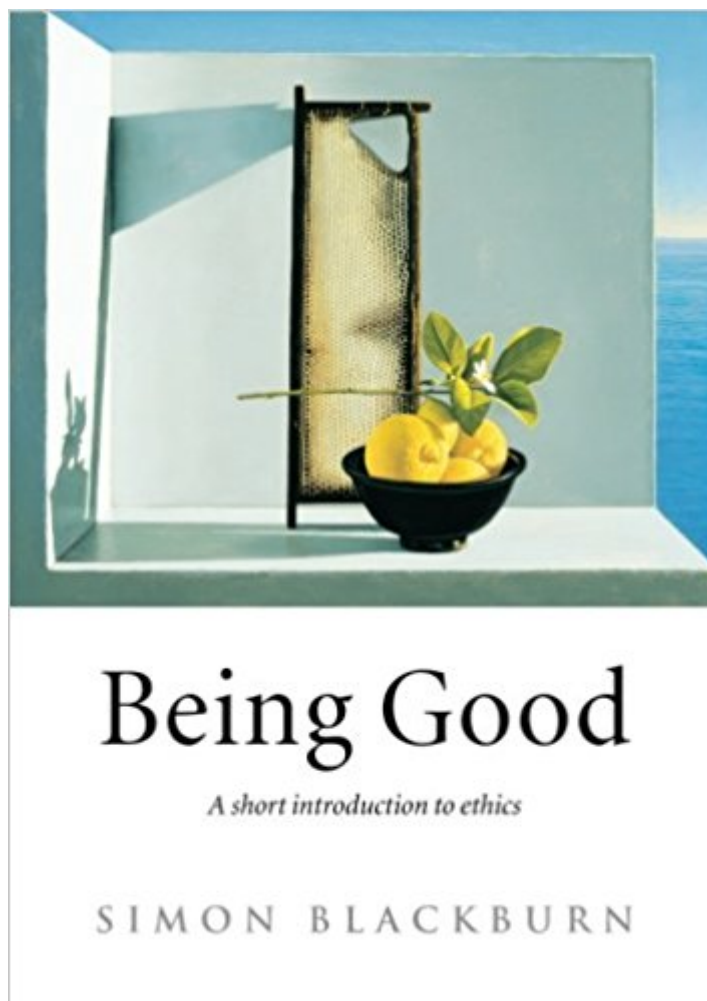


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# Being Good: A Short Introduction To Ethics



## Synopsis

Writing with wit and elegance, Simon Blackburn tackles the basic questions of ethics in this lively book, highlighting the complications and troubling issues that spring from the very simple question of how we ought to live. Blackburn dissects the many common reasons for why we are skeptical about ethics. Drawing on examples from history, politics, religion and everyday personal experience, he shows how cynicism and self-consciousness can paralyze us into considering ethics a hopeless pursuit. He assures us that ethics is neither futile nor irrelevant, but an intimate part of the most important issues of living--of birth, death, happiness, desire, freedom, pleasure, and justice. Indeed, from moral dilemmas about abortion and euthanasia, to our obsession with personal rights, to our longing for a sense of meaning in life, our everyday struggles are rife with ethical issues. Blackburn distills the arguments of Hume, Kant and Aristotle down to their essences, to underscore the timeless relevance of our voice of conscience, the pitfalls of complacency, and our concerns about truth, knowledge and human progress. Blackburn's rare combination of depth, rigor, and sparkling prose, along with his distinguished ranking among contemporary philosophers, mark *Being Good* as an important statement on our current disenchantment with ethics. It challenges us to take a more thoughtful reading of our ethical climate and to ponder more carefully our own standards of behavior.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not your typical ethics book: its sleek physical dimensions mirror Simon Blackburn's intelligent but unencumbered treatment of the main threats and origins of ethics. In *Being Good*,

Blackburn addresses the fear that "ethical claims are a kind of sham" before sketching a road map of the history of ethics, its practical consequences, and its ultimate foundations. All this is an ambitious task for such a diminutive volume. A professor of philosophy at the University of Cambridge, Blackburn is one of the giants of contemporary moral theory and a trustworthy guide through its labyrinth. He prefers parsimony to complexity--helpful for readers with only a casual acquaintance with philosophy--yet he manages to avoid trivializing his subject matter. Moreover, *Being Good* is wonderfully enlivened by illustrations by Paul Klee, William Blake, Eugène Delacroix, Francisco de Goya, and even Vietnam War photography and cartoons. Blackburn concludes on a promising note: "If we are careful, and mature, and imaginative, and fair, and nice, and lucky, the moral mirror in which we gaze at ourselves may not show us saints. But it need not show us monsters, either." --Eric de Place --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When faced with an ethical dilemma, should we seek solutions that offer the greatest good or happiness to the greatest number of people? Are there any universal laws or principles by which ethical conduct should be governed? From what sources are ethical principles derived? Cambridge philosopher Blackburn addresses these and other questions in this straightforward introduction to ethics, a companion to his *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. In part one, he considers seven subjects religion, relativism, evolutionary theory, egoism, determinism, unreasonable demands and false consciousness "that seem to suggest that ethics is somehow impossible." For example, relativism (the idea there is no one truth but different truths), he argues, often ends in nihilism, or the notion that there are indeed no values and no truth. Next, Blackburn discusses several ethical theories, including deontology (the theory that our ethical actions must be governed by rules) and utilitarianism (the theory that our ethical actions must be governed by their consequences), as well as rights theories and Kant's categorical imperative, which elevates duty to universal law. In a final section, Blackburn suggests that neither Kant, rights theories, deontology or utilitarianism provide adequate grounds for being good. Rather, he argues, "ethical principles are those that would be agreed in any reasonable cooperative procedure for coming to one mind about our conduct." Unfortunately, Blackburn never develops his idea about a common point of view for judging our conduct (he doesn't explain, for instance, how such a cooperative transaction can take place when partners in the conversation are using different ethical languages), and that is where this little book, which is so rich in analysis, falters significantly. Illus. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

My book review of *Being Good: An Introduction to Ethics* by Simon Blackburn published by Oxford University Press first published in 2001, ISBN 0-19-210052-1 \$8.18. The book is about the beginning of ethics and its foundation. The author wanted to give the reader some threats to ethics, some ideas of ethics, the background and foundation for ethics. He wanted to put his own spin on ethics plus mix in the views of some of the greatest philosophers in our history. The work is mostly written from the author's point of view, but he does often offer the view of other philosophers and ordinary people. The author did not try to convince the reader on any of his views; he only wanted to state his opinion and that of other scholars. The general field for the book is ethics which the title suggests. The intended audience is the average person interested in understanding the legacy of ethics. The author's writing style is very informal. He does not use a lot of words that normal people would not understand. The book is organized into three parts, part one is titled the Seven Threats to Ethics, part two is titled Some Ethical Ideas and part three is titled Foundations. I think the book is very well organized. It starts out by explaining ethics and then goes into some ethical ideas by introducing the thoughts of other philosophers and gives you the foundations by which you should stand on your ethics. The author's style of writing does fit his intended audience. The chapters seem to flow in chronological order. The separation of the three parts of the book really helps the reader understand what is coming next. You can get a sense from reading the chapter that you are currently reading on what is coming next plus the author makes references to what will be covered in upcoming chapters. The book did not change the way I thought about things before I read it. I do not think this was the author's intent. I thought the examples that the author gave about the Old Testament of the Bible was interesting. In the Old Testament animals were mistreated, children were mistreated, people were allowed to be enslaved, and the mistreatment of women. The author went on to discuss how the New Testament was more compassionate. He stated that rules are different to different people based on their teachings and the society that they live in. The author did make one point that made me change a saying that I often say, "When in Rome do as the Romans". The author asked if the Romans were doing something nasty, am I supposed to do it too. The book was interesting. It covered many aspects of ethics and gave a general background. The book did not focus on one subject concerning ethics. I have never read a book that was completely about ethics. The author did keep my interest. The one thing that puzzled me about the author was the way the author talked about women. Whenever he gave a negative example about something he would use "she", but when he was using a positive example he would never say she. The author discussed that there were fewer women in countries like China and India, but based on the numbers

and statistics there should be more women in those society. In summary the book was interesting reading. The author did discuss current issues like abortion, but did not state which side of the debate he was on. The author's goal was to give the reader a quick background on ethics from the beginning to its foundation. I think the author succeed in his goal. Another good point that the author made was that death was the greatest mystery, but if you believed in life after death there was no need to fear death. Overall this was a very good book to read. It kept my interest which is not easy to do.

Blackburn covers most of moral philosophy and infuses his own views as well, which is better than a plain history of philosophy

concise and nice!

Blackburn's book is a great introduction to ethics for people who want to learn about the subject but don't know where to start. It's also a great read for those considering a philosophy major.

Concise and to the point. Very nice summary of the history with precise descriptions of various positions from famous philosophers and entire schools of thought.

Should be required study for everyone.

If you want to have a summary of the foundation of philosophical ideas on ethics, a must read

Excellent, easy to read introduction to the field of ethics, theories and issues.

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