

Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

## Ethics

First-year 'společný základ' course

Spring 2025 (Letní semestr)

Lecturer: Christopher Cowley ([christopher.cowley@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:christopher.cowley@ff.cuni.cz))

Note: there are two different versions of this course, with two different course codes:

- ASZFS0074, for Czech students, which will be completed with a credit (zápočet)
- AFSV00439, for Erasmus students, which will be completed with a grade.
  - Note: if a Czech student takes the Erasmus version, the course will *not* be counted as a 'společný základ'
- Otherwise there is no difference: the two groups will study the same material, in the same timeslot and room, and take the same exam.

This course will provide an introduction to the philosophical subject of ethics (also known as 'moral philosophy'). The course is designed for students who have never studied philosophy before.

The course will use a single textbook, *Being Good* by Simon Blackburn (Oxford University Press 2001). An electronic copy of the full textbook is available on SIS (and on Moodle). Every week you will be asked to read two or three chapters of the book, and I will lecture on the topics in those chapters.

Warning: some of the topics will be a bit difficult, and you should get used to reading *and re-reading* the text. A philosophy textbook is not just a collection of facts. Rather, it is designed to get you thinking. Some of the topics produce difficult questions with no easy answer. For some of these questions, you might have an easy answer, but your classmates will have a different answer, or they will not be sure. I will try to bring out this complexity between different positions in the lectures. The important part is about articulating the question precisely, and avoiding over-simplistic answers.

Teaching: The lectures will take place every Monday at 10.50-12.20, in the lecture theatre 131 at the Faculty of Arts, at 2 Jana Palacha square (nám). The lectures will be in English. The lectures will make use of Power Point slides, and these slides will be posted on Moodle after each lecture. Questions will be permitted at any time during the lecture. I also encourage you to contact me by e-mail if you have any questions about the lecture or the book.

Assessment. The course will be assessed by a single 100% exam, to be held in the final lecture on Monday 12 May, in person, using a pen or pencil, in the regular lecture theatre. It will last one hour. The exam will comprise a number of questions explicitly about all chapters of the Blackburn text. The exact format of the exam will be made clear nearer the time.

Note: you are permitted to bring in a single 2-sided page of A4 (the 'cheat sheet') with hand-written notes or printed text (even very small text!). So part of the exercise will be for you to read the Blackburn, understand the Blackburn, and then compress the Blackburn text into two pages of notes.

Timetable

NB. The initials 'SB 1' = Simon Blackburn, chapter 1.

Wk		
1	17 Feb	Introduction to philosophy. Introduction to ethics. Introduction to the Blackburn text. Introduction to the main themes of the course.
2	24 Feb	SB 1, 2
3	3 Mar	SB 3, 4
4	10 Mar	SB 5, 6, 7
5	17 Mar	SB 8
6	24 Mar	SB 9
7	31 Mar	SB 10, 11, 12
8	7 Apr	SB 13, 14, 15
9	14 Apr	SB 16, 17
	21 Apr	<i>Easter Monday. No lecture</i>
10	28 Apr	SB 18, 19
11	5 May	SB 20, 21
12	12 May	<i>In-person exam. Usual lecture theatre, usual time. Bring the 'cheat sheet' and a pen/pencil. All devices in your bag under your seat.</i>