



Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil

By Paul Bloom

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A leading cognitive scientist argues that a deep sense of good and evil is bred in the bone.

From John Locke to Sigmund Freud, philosophers and psychologists have long believed that we begin life as blank moral slates. Many of us take for granted that babies are born selfish and that it is the role of society—and especially parents—to transform them from little sociopaths into civilized beings. In *Just Babies*, Paul Bloom argues that humans are in fact hardwired with a sense of morality. Drawing on groundbreaking research at Yale, Bloom demonstrates that, even before they can speak or walk, babies judge the goodness and badness of others' actions; feel empathy and compassion; act to soothe those in distress; and have a rudimentary sense of justice.

Still, this innate morality is limited, sometimes tragically. We are naturally hostile to strangers, prone to parochialism and bigotry. Bringing together insights from psychology, behavioral economics, evolutionary biology, and philosophy, Bloom explores how we have come to surpass these limitations. Along the way, he examines the morality of chimpanzees, violent psychopaths, religious extremists, and Ivy League professors, and explores our often puzzling moral feelings about sex, politics, religion, and race.

In his analysis of the morality of children and adults, Bloom rejects the fashionable view that our moral decisions are driven mainly by gut feelings and unconscious biases. Just as reason has driven our great scientific discoveries, he argues, it is reason and deliberation that makes possible our moral discoveries, such as the wrongness of slavery. Ultimately, it is through our imagination, our compassion, and our uniquely human capacity for rational thought that we can transcend the primitive sense of morality we were born with, becoming more than just babies.

Paul Bloom has a gift for bringing abstract ideas to life, moving seamlessly from Darwin, Herodotus, and Adam Smith to *The Princess Bride*, Hannibal Lecter, and Louis C.K. Vivid, witty, and intellectually probing, *Just Babies* offers a radical new perspective on our moral lives.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Conversation with Paul Bloom, Author of *Just Babies*



Q) What's up with the title?

A) It's meant to be playful, because it has two quite different meanings. *Just Babies* can express a reasonable skepticism about the abilities of these tiny creatures—what do you expect of them, they're just babies? But of course “just” also derives from justice—as in “a just society”—and so the title captures one of the main arguments of the book, which is that we are born as moral creatures. We start off as *just* babies. I know this sounds like a remarkable claim, but I hope that my book will convince people to take it seriously.

Q) What made you choose to write this book at this moment?

A) These are exciting times for anyone interested in morality. There are major developments in areas like social neuroscience, evolutionary theory, and moral philosophy. And several research teams—including my own at Yale—are making surprising discoveries about the moral lives of babies and children. I think that now, perhaps for the first time in history, we have scientifically informed answers to some of the questions that matter most: How is it that we are capable of transcendent kindness—and unspeakable cruelty? How do evolution, culture, parenting, and religion conspire to shape our moral natures? How do we make sense of people's strongly held opinions about abortion, gay marriage, affirmative action, and torture? And how can we become better people? *Just Babies* tries to answer these questions.

Q) How can you even study morality in babies?

A) In most of our own studies, we use puppet shows. We show babies characters who interact in certain ways—such as one individual helping another or one individual hitting another—and then see who the babies want to interact with, who they want to reward, and who they want to punish. Using these methods, we have discovered that even young babies have the capacity for moral judgment.

Q) So are babies naturally good, or naturally evil?

A) Both! We are born with empathy and compassion, the capacity to judge the actions of others, and a rudimentary understanding of justice and fairness. Morality is bred in the bone. But there is a nastier side to our natures as well. There's a lot of evidence that even the youngest babies carve the world into Us versus Them—and they are strongly biased to favor the Us. We are very tribal beings. Our natures are not just kind; they are also cruel and selfish. We favor those who look like us and are naturally cold-blooded towards strangers.

Q) Does this mean that prejudice and racism are inevitable?

A) Happily, no. For one thing, social experience really matters—babies and children have to learn who Us versus Them is by observing how those around them act. So while some distinctions are inevitable, such as friends versus strangers, others are not. Notably, it only pretty late in development—by about the age of five—that some children come to use skin color and similar cues when decide who to befriend and who to prefer. Before this, they don't know that race matters, and so whether or not children will be racist is dependent on how they are raised; what sort of social environments they find themselves in.

Also, we are smart critters, smart enough to override our impulses and biases when we think they are inappropriate. Once we learn about these ugly aspects of our nature, we can move to combat them. We can create treaties and international organizations aimed at protecting universal human rights. We can employ procedures such as blind reviewing and blind auditions that are designed to prevent judges from being biased, consciously or unconsciously, by a candidate's race—or anything other than what is under evaluation.

Q) It seems as if a lot of your interest is in how we come to transcend our hard-wired morality.

A) That's right. A complete theory of morality has to have two parts. It starts with what we are born with, and this is surprisingly rich. But a critical part of our morality—so much of what makes us human—is not the product of evolution, but emerges over the course of human history and individual development. It is the product of our compassion, our imagination, and our magnificent capacity for reason. We bring all that to bear when we consider such questions as: How much should we give to charity? Is it right to eat meat? Are there any sorts of consensual sex acts that are morally wrong?

Q) What do you want to accomplish with this book?

A) Two things. First, many people believe that we are born selfish and amoral—that we start off as natural-born psychopaths. And many argue that we are, as David Hume put it, slaves of the passions: our moral judgments and moral actions are the product of neural mechanisms that we have no awareness of and no conscious control over. Intelligence and wisdom are largely impotent. This is an ugly view of human nature. Now, if it were true, we should buck up and learn to leave with it. But it's not true; these dismissive claims are refuted by everyday experience, by history, and by the science of developmental psychology. We are

moral animals, and we are powerfully influenced by our capacity for reason.

Second, I think there are practical implications to the scientific study of morality. If you're interested in reducing racism and bigotry, for instance, it is critical to understand our inborn proclivity to favor our own group over others; if you want to create a just society, you'll want to learn about how we naturally think about fairness and equity. Good social policy is informed by an understanding of human nature at its best and its worst, and this is what *Just Babies* is all about.

From Publishers Weekly

With wit and passion, Yale psychology professor Bloom (*How Pleasure Works*) explores the nature of morality, drawing on current research in psychology, evolutionary biology, and philosophy while discussing which factors appear to be innate and which are culturally determined. Bloom's discussion of choices made by babies—three-month-olds through two-year-olds—and researchers' ability to assess those choices is fascinating and relies heavily on original research performed by him and his colleagues. He documents both good and bad news: Babies are moral animals who appear to have the ability to judge others' actions and to prefer both fairness and kindness; but they also are distressed by strangers and prone toward parochialism and bigotry. His analysis spans the moral spectrum from empathy to disgust and demonstrates how labile and open to manipulation some of our emotions and opinions are. When asked about their political leanings, for example, college students who were approached near a hand sanitizer in a public hallway claimed to be more conservative than students questioned elsewhere in the hallway. Because the vast majority of the research conducted has been on individuals in Western societies, drawing robust conclusions is difficult. Nonetheless, Bloom convincingly establishes that the nature of morality is open to scientific investigation. Agent: Katinka Matson, Brockman Inc. (Nov.)

Review

A *New York Times* Book Review Editor's Choice

"Insightful [and] frequently funny...Bloom manages to translate abstract principles into clear, readable prose, making complex material accessible to the layperson without oversimplifying. His voice is witty, engaging, and candidly quirky...Reveals striking truths about the nature of morality and humanity."

--*Boston Globe*

"Fascinating."

--*The Atlantic*

"Bloom has a talent for distilling scholarly work (his and others') into accessible, appealing prose...He writes with both an authority and an openness that suggest he would enjoy a lively discussion with any skeptics."

--*Washington Post*

"Bloom — an elegant, lucid and economical writer — makes an excellent guide...He's an observer and evaluator who's not ideologically invested in any one interpretation of the evidence... If he takes exception with moral philosophy's fixation on depersonalized thought problems, he is just as leery of the notion that morality is entirely based on feelings derived from our evolutionary past. The hard-wired stuff is just the beginning, Bloom points out, and reason has an essential part to play in our moral development, as well."

--*Laura Miller, Salon*

"In a lively, accessible style, Bloom...draws on research into adults from many societies, including the extant hunter-gatherer tribes. And he tackles the moral claims of philosophy and religion, arguing that we

understand how the 'amoral force of natural selection' may have instilled the foundations for moral thought and action."

--*New Scientist*

"Brisk and authoritative...[Bloom's] discussion of disgust is particularly good...the experiments he describes are nifty."

--*Nature*

"One comes to Paul Bloom for his unfailingly brilliant psychological research; one stays for the wise and relaxed way he writes about it."

--**Jim Holt**, author of *Why Does the World Exist?: An Existential Detective Story*

"The rich cognitive and moral life of babies is among the most fascinating discoveries of twenty-first-century psychology. Paul Bloom explains how this work illuminates human nature, and does it with his trademark clarity, depth, discernment, and graceful style."

--**Steven Pinker**, professor of psychology, Harvard University; author of *How the Mind Works*

"Take a tour through the latest and most amazing research in child psychology, and come back with a better understanding of the strange things adults do. Bloom shows us how a first rate scientist integrates conflicting findings, broad scholarship, and deep humanity to draw a nuanced and often surprising portrait of human nature, with all its beauty, horror, and wonder."

--**Jonathan Haidt**, Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership, New York University Stern School of Business; author of *The Happiness Hypothesis* and *The Righteous Mind*

"*Just Babies* is an extremely important book. Today it is received wisdom that morality is unreal: our evolutionary instincts are purely selfish. We're also told that human society is built on irrational impulses, that reason and choice count for nothing. A leading experimental psychologist, but also a skilled reader of philosophy, Bloom authoritatively punctures both of these errors. Lively and deftly argued, with admirably fair treatment of opposing views, *Just Babies* shows that humans inherit a rich basis for morality, but also some disturbing tendencies. Making the best of the good and doing what we can to inhibit the bad is the job of history, culture and reason."

--**Martha C. Nussbaum**, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics, University of Chicago; author of *Political Emotions*

"Wonderfully clear and entertaining...If you want to understand yourself, your children, and the psychopath in the next cubicle better than you do at present--read this book."

--**Sam Harris**, author of *Free Will* and *The End of Faith*

"*Just Babies* is a fascinating, original exploration of our sense of right and wrong. Bloom and his colleagues plumb the mysteries of morality by playing games with babies, and in this witty, elegant book, he demonstrates the profound lessons we can gain from their responses. After finishing it, you'll never look at an infant the same way again."

--**Carl Zimmer**, author of *Soul Made Flesh: The Discovery of the Brain and How it Changed the World*

"In *Just Babies*, Paul Bloom provides a wonderful, in-depth look at how our morality develops from infancy onward, making the strong case for the subtle interplay of genes and environment in the way we turn out -- a must for social science enthusiasts and parents."

--**Dan Ariely**, James B. Duke Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics; author of *Predictably Irrational*

"Paul Bloom's engaging explorations of the moral preferences of infants set the stage for a book that isn't really 'just babies' because it goes deeply into the nature of morality itself, for all of us. This is a book for everyone who wants to know more about the kind of moral beings we are."

--**Peter Singer**, Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics, Princeton University; author of *The Life You Can Save*

"Paul Bloom has such an interesting mind, and it's a rare treat to follow as he tracks the origins of human morality. With clarity and wit, Bloom shows that babies have an incredible amount to teach us—and in these masterful pages, the lessons are full of surprise and delight."

--**Emily Bazelon**, author of *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy*

"'The Origins of Good and Evil' is an ambitious subtitle, but this book earns it. Paul Bloom combines graceful, witty writing with intellectual rigor to produce a compelling account of how and why people are so wonderful and so horrible. Drawing on his own pioneering work and the work of many other psychologists, Bloom shows that, from infancy on, the imprint of our creator, natural selection, is evident: we are in some sense moral animals, complete with compassion and a sense of justice, but our "moral compass" can be self-serving, sometimes to gruesome effect. Still, transcendence of a sort is possible; Bloom rightly emphasizes the edifying power of reason and self-reflection, and notes how these tools of enlightenment have led to genuine moral progress. This book, by fostering self-reflection, is itself a tool of enlightenment, and can help humanity take another step toward the good."

--**Robert Wright**, author of *The Moral Animal* and *The Evolution of God*

"*Just Babies* is exactly the combination of penetrating insight, cutting-edge science, and elegant prose that readers have come to expect from one of psychology's best writers and sharpest minds."

--**Daniel Gilbert**, Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology, Harvard University; author of *Stumbling on Happiness*

"Paul Bloom is a scientist who knows how to tell a fascinating and charming story. As a new parent, I found *Just Babies* not only full of insights into my son's developing moral sense but also a great pleasure to read."

--**Joshua Foer**, author of *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*

"That morality is bred into us is clear from the evolutionary continuity with other species as well as the reactions of young infants long before we can expect moral reasoning and logic. In his lively, personable style Paul Bloom reviews the spectacular new evidence for the early emergence of the human sense of right and wrong."

--**Frans de Waal**, author of *The Bonobo and the Atheist*; C. H. Candler Professor and Director of the Living Links Center at the Yerkes Primate Center

"Without God does anything go? No, because we have an evolved moral nature that gives us a sense of right and wrong. But when does this sense develop? Thanks to Paul Bloom and this remarkable and important book, we have an answer—very early childhood. *Just Babies* is a vital contribution to the scientific study of morality that fills in a major gap in our understanding of human nature, and as a bonus it's a riveting read!"

--**Michael Shermer**, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and author of *The Science of Good and Evil*

"Paul Bloom is one of the best psychologist-writers today. In *Just Babies* he combines hard data with charming anecdote and incisive analysis to explore one of the most profound questions that's ever confronted

mankind: how we become moral beings. He makes an erudite and impassioned case for the primacy of deliberation and reason in our lives—a truth given short shrift in pop psychology."

--**Sally Satel, M.D.**, coauthor of *Brainwashed: The Seductive Appeal of Mindless Neuroscience*

"Bloom makes a convincing case that morality demands compassion but sometimes also overrides it ... An engaging examination of human morality."

--**Kirkus Reviews**

"With wit and passion, Yale psychology professor Bloom (*How Pleasure Works*) explores the nature of morality, drawing on current research in psychology, evolutionary biology, and philosophy while discussing which factors appear to be innate and which are culturally determined. Bloom convincingly establishes that the nature of morality is open to scientific investigation."

--**Publishers Weekly**

"With his account sharply tuned to the general reader, Bloom skims along assuredly through the research. He uses the findings to nimbly springboard into discussions of philosophy and psychology, exploring the bases of large moral debates, such as acceptable sexual practices or when killing is justified. Of interest both to parents curious about the inner lives of their little ones and to those seeking a more general, thought-provoking examination of morality, the book offers remarkable insight into our first baby steps as moral beings."

--**Booklist**

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donald Howard:

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone in everywhere. The information can be a know-how or any news even restricted. What people must be consider when those information which is inside former life are challenging be find than now could be taking seriously which one works to believe or which one the resource are convinced. If you obtain the unstable resource then you have it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen throughout you if you take *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* as your daily resource information.

Frank Keating:

The book untitled *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* is the reserve that recommended to you you just read. You can see the quality of the e-book content that will be shown to a person. The language that creator use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The author was did a lot of exploration when write the book, and so the information that they share for you is absolutely accurate. You also could possibly get the e-book of *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* from the publisher to make you much more enjoy free time.

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