

Paul Bloom

## Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil

The Crown Publishing Group, New York, 2013; 273 pp

Living in a complex and dynamic world that rapidly changes, witnessing cruelty, violence, and criminal, anxious about the terrorism, faced with the constant fear, now, more than ever, our morality is tempted. Our reactions to obvious moral violations to which we are daily exposed range from anesthetizing conscience and doing nothing to the extent of strong motivation for punishment or even revenge. More than ever, we, the humans, need to know how to become better and how to create more humane society. We need to understand what lies behind our actions and our judgments, how we make moral decisions and decide about fairness and equity, how we make preferences, how we shape our biases in judgment of others and finally what drives our actions. This book reveals it is possible to study scientifically those questions. Although we should never judge the book to its cover, in this case, the intriguing cover as well as the title of the Bloom's book, *Just babies*, invites to read it immediately finding the numerous answers about the nature of our morality. Professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale University, Paul Bloom, cites the most prominent scientists from evolutionary biology, psychology, neuroscience and philosophy reviewing their findings. In seven chapters of the book, with notes and rich bibliographic references for reader to discover throughout each chapter, Bloom explores what are the origins of our moral capacities, where our intuitions about what is good or wrong come from and how they really work. He is questioning our capability for *transcendent kindness* and in the same time the *capacity of appalling cruelty* trying to answer how is possible for a man, in his words, to *metastasize into evil*. His analysis demonstrate how manipulation of emotional context can change our moral judgment and our will to help others, offering explanation and arguments about the relation between moral cognition and moral emotions. He argues, supported by research findings, that humans are not driven mainly by unconscious and that we as human beings have the innate capacity for compassion, imagination and reason. Bloom highlights the importance of

understanding our social experience, and how our environment, our interaction with others and our cultural identification can influence our development and shape our personalities as well as our moral sense. Working within his research team at Yale University he describes and explains findings from their experiments and developmental psychology research on young babies. They found that young babies are moral animals and that they show the capacity for moral judgment and a rudimentary sense of justice and fairness. Through the chapters Bloom reflects on diverse themes and research findings like the role of altruism and generosity in our lives, the power of personal contact, the importance of taking perspective, the role religion has in our judgment, he discusses our gut feelings, the fMRI studies and the neural basis of morality, embodied moral judgment and many others. He concludes his investigation about the origins of our morality explaining that the must have ingredients, that need to be better explored as well as developed and treasured, are our human imagination, compassion, and our intelligence. As it is well explained, all those ingredients *give rise to moral insight and moral progress and make us more than just babies.*

Bloom's book proves that experimental psychology has much to offer and that psychologists can contribute to the clarification of the nature of morality, and more, that the nature of morality can be scientifically investigated. In the context of understanding today's numerous bioethical questions and the need to develop bioethical sensibility relevant for the future of humanity, *Just babies* is also a proof for the necessity for interdisciplinary approach and collaboration within the science of morality.

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