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### December 30, 2013: The Moral Universe

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Title: The Moral Universe

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12/30/2013—Today, in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, columnist David Brooks noted essays from 2013 that won Sidney Awards. One of these was a mini-debate between Steven Pinker and Leon Wieseltier about the role of science in modern thought. Here is what Brooks wrote about Pinker's presentation: "Pinker argues that science has demonstrated that 'the belief systems of all the world's traditional religions and cultures — their theories of the origins of life, humans and societies — are factually mistaken.' Instead, science has given us a different value system: 'The facts of science, by exposing the absence of purpose in the laws governing the universe, force us to take responsibility for the welfare of ourselves, our species and our planet. For the same reason, they undercut any moral or political system based on mystical forces.' Pinker is making a number of assumptions that seem unwarranted, such as science exposing the absence of purpose in the laws governing the universe. What "fact" would show such a thing? Here is an example of science suggesting a universe full of purpose, or what could be considered purpose. I referred in my Church, State book to evidence that babies have a kind of moral life. Apparently, more evidence of this is now available, in a new book by Yale psychologist Paul Bloom, entitled *Just Babies: the origin of good and evil*. Bloom argues that the evidence shows that babies very early and across cultures prefer nice puppets and people. In one experiment, 1-year olds punished a puppet who refused to share. Infants as young as three months old preferred looking at helpers rather than hinderers. Maybe proof of innate morality is too strong a word to use. But results like this are very far from Pinker's purposeless universe. Instead, this is a reality that selects for the good.