



The Anatomy of Evil

Michael H. Stone , Otto F. Kernberg (Contributor)

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The crimes of Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, Dennis Rader, and other high-profile killers are so breathtakingly awful that most people would not hesitate to label them "evil." In this groundbreaking book, renowned psychiatrist Michael H. Stone—host of Discovery Channel's former series *Most Evil*—uses this common emotional reaction to horrifying acts as his starting point to explore the concept and reality of evil from a new perspective. In an in-depth discussion of the personality traits and behavior that constitute evil across a wide spectrum, Dr. Stone takes a clarifying scientific approach to a topic that for centuries has been inadequately explained by religious doctrines.

Basing his analysis on the detailed biographies of more than 600 violent criminals, Stone has created a 22-level hierarchy of evil behavior, which loosely reflects the structure of Dante's *Inferno*. He traces two salient personality traits that run the gamut from those who commit crimes of passion to perpetrators of the worst crimes—sadistic torture and murder. One trait is narcissism, as exhibited in people who are so self-centered that they have little or no ability to care about their victims. The other is aggression, the use of power over another person to inflict humiliation, suffering, and death.

Stone then turns to the various factors that, singly or intertwined, contribute to pushing certain people over the edge into committing heinous crimes. They include heredity, adverse environments, violence-prone cultures, mental illness or brain injury, and abuse of mind-altering drugs. All are considered in the search for the root causes of evil behavior.

What do psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience tell us about the minds of those whose actions could be described as evil? And what will that mean for the rest of us? Stone discusses how an increased understanding of the causes of evil will affect the justice system. He predicts a day when certain persons can safely be declared salvageable and restored to society and when early signs of violence in children may be corrected before potentially dangerous patterns become entrenched.

The Anatomy of Evil Details

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(Contributor)**

From Reader Review The Anatomy of Evil for online ebook

Tara says

A fascinating scientific approach to what is typically lobbed about as a moral term. Way better than his show, Most Evil, by the way.

Nurse Nightmare says

I did like the analogies and so many examples he used to make a scale as such for 'evil' itself. I did however feel towards the end of the book with the after thoughts ect it was dragging on and not bringing anything new to the table. Very interesting concept though and very easy to read, also interesting.

Kristen says

I like the show---kind of interesting theory of evil existing on 22 levels. Book is really really good....goes into the science and rationale behind the groupings, the triad (bedwetting, animal abuse, setting fires) of childhood suggestive behavior)...really really good...uses lots of anecdotal evidence and references a ton of sources. I am looking at two of the other books referenced by this book right now. Of course you kind of have to be into this sort of thing (serial killers, child killers, etc)

Ingrid says

Fantastic! I LOVED this book. I am a forensic psychiatrist and so work with a lot of people on this spectrum of "evil". This book gave overviews of several different cases, where the author (Dr. Michael Stone, a forensic psychiatrist) had made a gradations of evil scale. There was a lot of discussion on what causes people to do the things they do, from genes, trauma, experiences, brain injury to people just born bad. I read the entire thing in two days. It was not a dense book, it flowed. Highly recommend!

Michele Lee says

Prepare for a journey though the dark side with today's most widely recognized forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Michael Stone. After years (and hundreds of killers studied) Stone created the Graduations of Evil Scale, and this book is his explanation of the process. The Anatomy of Evil is intense, featuring many profiles of killers, and none of the ones you'd expect. There are no Bundy or Gacy or Dahmer profiles here. And the focus doesn't stay on serial or mass killers at all.

Stone also doesn't give a text book regurgitation of facts, but also adds theories on how religion, media and social influences what our ideas of evil are, and how these notorious (often unrepentant) killers fit into that. The Anatomy of Evil is THE definitive work on killer psychology and likely will remain so for a while to come. It also tackles the difficulty of defining evil itself, the causes, effects and way society can deal with it.

Stone's style, while academic is not beyond the understanding of even casual interest. The book is an incredible read, infinitely fascinating and should be a mandatory part of every public collection. Its value to research, be it to writers or budding psychiatrists and law enforcement, or just people trying to understand the motives of those around them, is immense. While Stone handles the horrible details without allowing the book to become profane, or gory it is a hard read just because of the depths of the depravity it explores. But Stone handles the rough subject matter with delicacy and skill, and most of all composure, that most would struggle with.

Contains: descriptions of true, horrifying criminal acts including torture, rape and murder

Seth says

My favorite dubious conclusion was that serial killers who have issues with women start off killing cats because cats have faces like beautiful women.

Not entirely made up of bad arguments, but some of his ideas are definitely outdated. Also the rating system is entirely too subjective and without any real point, except as a way to organize his book.

William Schram says

At turns fascinating and horrifying, Doctor Michael H. Stone's analysis of Evil in mankind is quite well done. Starting out with Dante Alighieri's different levels of hell, Dr. Stone attempts to classify levels of evil according to a certain standard. This is something that is difficult to do, seeing as how people do not all come from the same mold. There are signs that one can follow; like when a child enjoys torturing animals, but even that is not decisive.

Anyway, Stone's system is called The Gradations of Evil. In it, there are 22 different levels, going from justified self-defense killing all the way to sadistic torture murders. In the book, there are short biographies of the criminals or perpetrators, the crimes they committed and a supposed rating on the scale. Some of these atrocities go beyond imagination and defy our sense of decency, justice, and a loving God.

Some of the criminals I have heard of, mostly from the news, but most I have not. This is mostly because I don't really gain joy from reading about horrible things people do to each other. The one that stays in my mind the most is probably the one where a father injected his own 5-year old son with HIV positive blood, giving him AIDS just so he could avoid being a parent.

Anna Higgins says

For my first Dr. Michael Stone book I was preparing myself for a long, dense read however I found this book very informative and engaging using many examples starting from murders of passion to sadistic psychopaths.

What I learnt from this book is that murders labeled as evil can't be tarred with the same brush.

Dr Stone picks a part how we apply the term evil, not just based off the criminal act but how a combination of neurological abnormalities, mental health, genetics and environment could eventually drive someone to inflict harm on another person.

At times I did have to put the book down, specifically when David Parker Ray was brought up but if you are like me and have a big interest in crime beyond it's shock value this book is an essential read.

Reese Copeland says

I really loved this book. It gives good, detailed information as to what traits may exist that can be interpreted as evil. Being a counselor, I found this book fascinating in the author's attempt to organize the traits and how it relates to "gradations" of evil. He provides incredible case studies and examples of real life persons who have been considered evil and what their lives may have been like that contributed to their acts. Pretty easy read, very interesting!

Monster says

Prometheus, 2009

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Tiffany says

I had my fears in the beginning that this book was going to be dry and boring... It started out with a few definitions of evil that sort of made my head spin (then again, I started it at 3am on a night shift... brains don't function adequately at that time...) But very quickly I realized that my first assumptions were completely negative. This book was written in such a fluid motion that putting it down was next to

impossible, despite how uncomfortable I was by reading about such horrible acts. Dr. Stone has a gift for writing about the horrible and despicable of the human race. There was even a part where, at first, I disagreed with him on how he could possibly have compassion or sympathy for a serial killer on death row after reading about the disgusting things that he had done. He felt the compassion after the killer's frank discussion of how his caregiver had abused him as a child. At first, I still couldn't find any compassion in myself. I do agree that no person should ever be subjected to something as heinous as abuse by a parent or loved one, but I did not understand how that could translate into being a serial killer, when there are people in the world who are victims of horrible acts, but go on to lead fulfilling and peaceful lives. Dr. Stone later discusses this same fact and explains that being abused as a child is not a guaranteed code for developing psychopathic traits later in life, but it is a strong influence. And while he does not feel that this killer deserves at any time to be released from jail, he does regret that as a boy, this killer was never allowed the opportunity to feel compassion or love from a caregiver.

Definitely an excellent, excellent read... it compels me to want to read a lot more!

Pamela says

I found this book very interesting, not only for its theme, but for its incorporation of "evil" as a social category and its attempt to scale evil degrees. It is quite easy to read, even for someone who is not familiar with neuroscience and its terms, and it provides an excellent compilation of references for further information. However, I think the last chapter, which focuses on neuroscience and evil, could have been longer, maybe it could be updated as research provides new knowledge on the theme. Overall, a great reading.

Duchess says

YAWN! Thought I would enjoy it, I was sadly mistaken.

Chandra Claypool (wherethereadergrows) says

I have always been fascinated with how the human mind works - especially in the cases of abnormal psychology and what actually causes a person to be "evil" or how they can justify the actions they've taken - rape, murder, manipulation, etc. Nature vs. Nurture has been a debate that's been going on for ages. Can a human being be born evil? There are cases of kids growing up in perfectly normal houses, with a normal social atmosphere that kill. Are they crazy? Were they born that way? Or what, if anything, triggered them?

Michael Stone doesn't believe in the inherent "bad seed"... that people are born evil. While there are cases that can be seen that way, if you look further, there seems to be a base of where their behavior came from and the author's theories are hard to argue with.

I have done hours upon hours of studying serial killers/true crime. I make no apologies for my morbid curiosity. Stone not only references the big names that we know such as Manson, but also recounts up to 600 different cases - not just regurgitating them for our morbid brain food, but also providing theories about them as well. FASCINATING. Simply. Fascinating.

I may not read much nonfiction, but when I do... it's almost always in this type of genre. What do you believe? Can people just be evil? What's your definition of this word? As society changes, what becomes more "acceptable" and how can we justify people's actions. If any of this intrigues you, I highly recommend picking up this book and seeing how the author brings cases, logic and his 22-level hierarchy of evil behavior into the mix. I surely will be side-eyeing and being even more skeptical of the human race. So thank you, Mr. Stone... all jokes aside, you've certainly re-opened my interest into the psychology/psychiatry/neuroscience of human behavior.

Lolly K Dandeneau says

I loved reading this book! I enjoyed the series, Most Evil. I am fascinated by the psychology of such people. It is interesting to read that several killers had injured their head when young. There must be a connection to brain trauma in some cases. Of course, in my heart I believe some people just have evil in them, even if that goes against science. I do realize a good majority has been injected with their inhumanity due to early trauma, abuse, genetics and environment. There are certainly enough cases within this book that makes you think 'well of course after being subjected to such darkness this person grew up to kill' but then there is always the argument that many people who have survived epic abuse and torture went on to live good lives and helped others, rather than murdering or torturing. Why do some chose a dark path? These are answers we may never know. There are those who come from good families who turn to evil acts.

I think the world would benefit from studying such criminals. The scale Stone created makes sense, I don't think you can place a parent who kills the person who abused their child at the same level of evil as say, Ted Bundy. So such a scale surely is necessary.

I enjoyed his mention of the atrocities of war and mob behavior aren't quite the same as individual evil. That many that take part in killing or rioting as a group have a tendency to say WE when speaking of the crime, as if it wasn't an individual choice. Michael Stone is very interesting to read, I can't imagine stomaching such criminals in the name of science, but thank God some people can. Wonderful book! Highly recommended. I need to mention that his novel isn't about glorifying the killers, as some crime literature tends to do.
