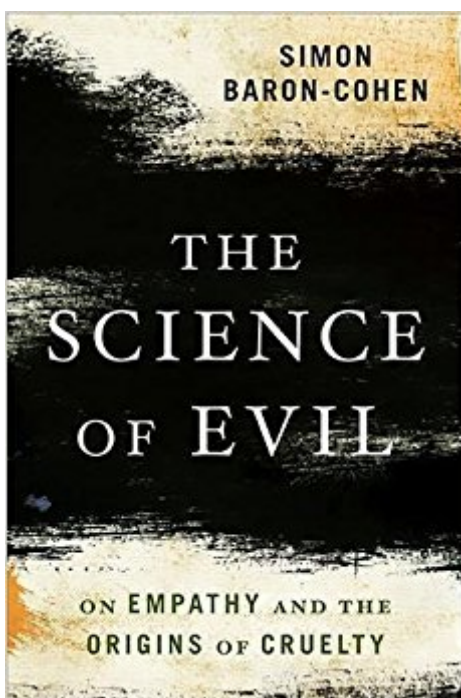


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# The Science Of Evil: On Empathy And The Origins Of Cruelty



## Synopsis

Borderline personality disorder, autism, narcissism, psychosis, Asperger's: All of these syndromes have one thing in common--lack of empathy. In some cases, this absence can be dangerous, but in others it can simply mean a different way of seeing the world. In *The Science of Evil* Simon Baron-Cohen, an award-winning British researcher who has investigated psychology and autism for decades, develops a new brain-based theory of human cruelty. A true psychologist, however, he examines social and environmental factors that can erode empathy, including neglect and abuse. Based largely on Baron-Cohen's own research, *The Science of Evil* will change the way we understand and treat human cruelty.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

New York Times "A simple but persuasive hypothesis for a new way to think about evil." Paul Harris, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Simon Baron-Cohen displays once again his ability to bring science to bear on troubling and controversial issues. Arguing that we explain nothing by describing acts of wanton cruelty as evil, he explores the simple but powerful hypothesis that such acts can be traced to a distinct psychological state--a lack of empathy. He backs up his claim with a wealth of research; from developmental psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience and genetics. Those who have to deal with the aftermath of cruelty may not agree with Baron-Cohen's analysis but they will surely be informed and provoked by his boldness and originality. —Michael Gazzaniga, Professor of Psychology, University of California - Santa Barbara; author of *The Ethical Brain*; *Horrible*

crimes usually freeze the mind, leaving only a desire for retribution. Simon Baron-Cohen has taken us beyond those mental inadequacies. In this book, proposing a new way to think about evil people and empathy, he has laid the scientific groundwork for a future and brighter science of understanding the dark side of the human condition.

— Andrew N. Meltzoff, co-director of University of Washington Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences and co-author of *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us about the Mind*; *What makes someone evil? What's the brain got to do with it?* Baron-Cohen confronts the most urgent and controversial questions in social neuroscience. Both disturbing and compassionate this brilliant book establishes a new science of evil, explaining both its brain basis and development. Baron-Cohen fundamentally transforms how we understand cruelty in others and in so doing forces us to examine ourselves. Reading this book invites us to widen our own circle of empathy; compelling us to grow and comprehend, if not forgive.

— Boston Globe; *The Science of Evil* contains a huge amount of useful information for a rather short read; it's an important early step in building a more robust understanding of our species at its most horrific.

— Psychology Today; Rigorously researched; [Baron-Cohen's] discussion of how parents can instill lifelong empathy in their children is particularly useful.

— Terry Eagleton, *Financial Times*; Attractively humane; fascinating information about the relation between degrees of empathy and the state of our brains.

— Marco Iacoboni, Professor, UCLA; author of *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others*; *The Science of Evil* is a compelling journey into the ubiquitous power of empathy in our lives. The devastating effects of 'zero degrees of empathy' are masterfully described and thoroughly analyzed. Professor Simon Baron-Cohen's book shows how, with its unexpected and unsettling absence, empathy reveals its foundational role in human sociality.

— Dr. Helena Cronin, Co-Director, Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science, LSE; Bringing cruelty triumphantly into the realm of science, this pioneering journey into human nature at last delivers us from 'evil.'

— Uta Frith, Emeritus Professor of Cognitive Development, UCL; A compelling and provocative account of empathy as our most precious social resource. Lack of empathy lurks in the darkest corners of human history and Simon Baron-Cohen does not shrink from looking at them under the fierce light of science.

— Matt Ridley, author of *The Rational Optimist*; Simon Baron-Cohen combines his creative talent with evidence and reason to make the case that evil is essentially a failure of empathy. It is an understanding that can enlighten an old debate and hold out the promise of new remedies.

— Richard Holloway, *Literary Review*; Ground-breaking and important.... This humane and immensely sympathetic

book calls us to the task of reinterpreting aberrant human behaviour so that we might find ways of changing it for the better.... The effect is not to diminish the concept of human evil, but to demystify it.

• The Spectator (UK); Short, clear, and highly readable. Baron-Cohen guides you through his complex material as if you were a student attending a course of lectures. He's an excellent teacher; there's no excuse for not understanding anything he says.

• Times Higher Education Supplement (UK); Engaging and informative.

• Dorothy Rowe, The Guardian (UK); A book that gets to the heart of man's inhumanity to man.... Baron-Cohen has made a major contribution to our understanding of autism.

• Ian Critchley, Sunday Times (UK); Fascinating; bold.

• Science Focus; Easy to read and packed with anecdotes. The author conveys brain research with verve.

• Publishers Weekly (starred review); Baron-Cohen's professorial background shines through in the book's tone and in step-by-step, engaging prose urging both academic and lay reader alike to journey with him in scientific inquiry.

Simon Baron-Cohen is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology in the departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge. He is the Director of the University's Autism Research Centre, and a Fellow of Trinity College. He has received the Spearman Medal, the May Davison Award for Clinical Psychology, and the Presidents Award from the British Psychological Society. He has also won the McAndless Award from the American Psychological Association. His previous books include *The Essential Difference* and *Mindblindness*. He lives in Cambridge, England.

A good book on empathy, but not sufficiently correlated with evil as suggested by the title. The author does make a comparison between low empathy with negative consequences, and those with positive consequences. He discusses the three primary outcome of the negative aspects, namely narcissism, psychopathy and borderline personality disorder. However what I felt was missing was a good definition of Evil, and the way those three characteristics play into that definition. Nevertheless, an interesting read for a non-technical psychology person.

What caught my eye is the validity of this author since he's mingling such an existential topic. Not only is his argument well prepared but he lays it out, case by case, comprehensively. Great read, highly recommended if you want some food for thought!

This book has opened my mind to the causes of what we called evil. I position on the death penalty has changed. I just wish that more money would go into improving better understanding of these behaviors. I also pitched the audio book version and listen during my daily commutes to work in Los Angeles.

The author is obviously a scientist and not a gifted writer, but several months after reading it I'm still impressed by the zero-empathy types that we meet several times per year. Anybody with a loved one with Borderline, or autism, or Antisocial personality disorder might find some pertinent revelations here. His anecdote of "Carol" still sticks with me. She would scream at her kids "I'm going to kill myself and I hope you know it's your fault" and then drive away and go out with friends and have a great time. Whoa. Never marry a Borderline.

The information presented in this book is not new for the most part. The writing style is clear, concise, appendix and references are very helpful.

After surviving an evil psychopathic relationship and writing "THE SECRET LIFE OF CAPTAIN X: MY LIFE WITH A PSYCHOPATH PILOT," I had hoped Mr. Baron-Cohen's book could provide me with detailed information on psychopathy (which is evil!) but the book was true to its title and mostly filled with clinical research on empathy and cruelty. In all, a good read!

Excellent read.

Since we are having more and more incidents of people(men) killing others, this is very relevant for the times. Especially, sports figures who are doping with extra Testosterone. The rage factor for this activity is causing a lot of death and destruction. Autistic-Asperger people who have had a rotten life with abuse in their families and no proper training on how to get along with people can become "evil" but not more so than Alcohol Syndrome or Schizophrenics. It is a fascinating subject, this book.

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