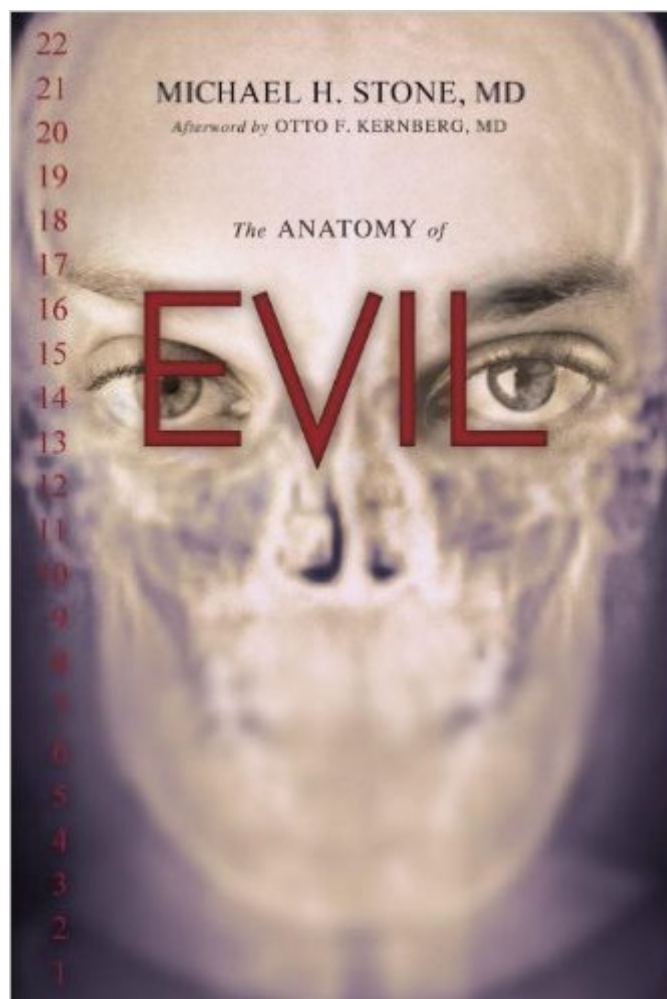


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The Anatomy Of Evil



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

In "Anatomy of Evil," Dr. Stone (known for his Discovery Channel show, "Most Evil") defines and expands upon the "scale of evil" he uses on the series. Going much further in depth and scholarly analysis than in that excellent series (yet remaining accessible from a lay person's point of view), he defines "evil" against a backdrop of religious, philosophical and psychological debate, favoring in the end a usage that is really separate from those disciplines, and that emerges from contemporary consensus (culled from newscasts, reports, the sentences by a judge, etc.). An important feature of the book is that Stone focuses chiefly here on heinous acts in peacetime (as opposed to in the name of one warring faction, political regime, or another, which Stone suggests would be material for an entirely separate book). Stone has distilled hundreds of true crime books and a vast catalogue of the human cruelty into a compelling and chilling book. He has also interviewed serial killers in prison and mental hospitals, contributing further to his special insights as a forensic psychiatrist. On Dr. Stone's scale, the highest numbers (the "most evil") are reserved for those who are both extremely sadistic AND are aware (that is, not driven by hallucinations, or other mental disorder) of their actions (prolonged torture, violent rape, murder, etc.), and who show little or no remorse afterward. Like Dante's Inferno, with its descending circles of Hell that Stone refers to in his chapter headings, "The Anatomy of Evil" is a sophisticated, subtle, and uncompromising analysis of the worst in humanity (including contemporary examples, such as Joseph Fritzl, the Austrian father who raped his daughter and kept her and their children in a dungeon beneath his home for decades).

Stone has written a solid account of how violent criminals operate and what their characteristics are. He provides a lot of summaries about some of the worst criminals and does some scientific analysis

of why they commit violent acts. The book goes between pure academic analysis and sensational story telling; it is neither of both. He has a love of the classics and shows off some of his learning by making references to them, especially Dante's Inferno, which he uses as a scale for how evil each violent criminal is. I did not understand the purpose behind ratings though. The book lacks original insight into the subject. Given the subject, it is disturbing reading at times. When they are not committing violent acts, these criminals can seem rather normal. As far as violent criminals' characteristics go, they often have the three characteristics in their youth of violence against pet animals, fire-starting, and bed wetting. In their adult years, they may move on to violence against humans. Often these children grow up unloved, unwanted, and abused. These violent criminals are narcissistic and lack empathy for other people's feelings. They have failed to become socialized by good parental care. Occasionally, violent criminals can come from good homes though. They often deny their crimes and show no remorse for their actions. Stone thinks that both genes and environment influence violent behavior in a 50/50 split. Sometimes these criminals have had a severe head injury which reduces their inhibitions or they are on drugs or alcohol which reduces their inhibitions to do evil. They no longer have the mental "brakes" to stop acting out violent fantasies. Although most people have violent fantasies, only rarely do individuals act them out.

I watched Dr. Stone's show on what is now Discovery ID. I didn't like mostly because there was nothing tying together his arbitrary list of numbers of evil. So why on earth did I get the book???? I am interested in this type of stuff. I'm a true crime buff and I thought I'd give him a chance by attempting to read the book. I was surprised by how much I liked the book. His work and expertise as a Forensic Psychiatrist is more properly displayed in this book than on the show in my opinion. I still feel the gradations of Evil were very arbitrary to what HE decided, but it's his book. And he actually allowed a layperson to understand perfectly his points. Something his show never got across to me in a meaningful way. Everyone understands a man who murders his wife may not be as "EVIL" as say serial killer. But in the show he never really expressed how he made distinctions between murderers which confused me. Isn't one murder as bad as any other? But this psychiatrist's job is to deal in criminal psyche's. So I imagine after dealing with people like he does, you begin to make distinctions like say a wife/husband murderer less vile than say a serial killer in the highest torture categories. I actually would like to watch the show again now that I understand what his purpose was. Evil isn't a very 'scientific' term even for a Psychiatrist. But what else do you call the breaking of the ultimate Taboo? This was the first book I read about pure Forensic Psychiatry/Psychology put in such a creative way. I enjoyed this book as a revelation, not a

voyeuristic look at the criminals. But understanding that even those who work with these people as their chosen profession, never lose their ability to be troubled by the evil in society.

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