

A Review of Simon Baren-Cohen's *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*

Isha Patkar and Dayanna Gonzalez*

Simon Baren-Cohen's *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty* is a non-fiction, informative novel written through a psychological lens. To give a brief synopsis, this book dives into the reasoning behind the corrosion of empathy, which ultimately leads to cruelty. He provides numerous examples of eroded empathy in humans through history, personal experience, and speculation. Ultimately, Baron-Cohen connects disorders and conditions such as autism, psychosis, narcissism, personality disorder, and more to enhance his theory, which is developed through the novel.

Regarding the overarching themes presented in the novel, the definition of evil is the lack of empathy. The erosion of empathy can be caused by multiple social, environmental, and even biological factors. People that behave in such manners are often called "evil". The exploration of the origins of evil revealed that in most occasions, when there is a zero degree of empathy, the main contributing factors are external and environmental. Many traumas or experiences that make a call to action to the individual create a reactive stimulus, which they are unaware of in many cases, and can gradually lead to the loss of empathy.

Overall, the target audience for this specific piece are individuals who desire to learn more about why people are the way they are. More specifically, since this book is written through a psychological perspective, it may be more interesting for individuals looking to pursue a career in psychology or medicine.

*Sophomore Students, Fulton Science Academy.

Contact: ipatkar@fultonscienceacademy.org, dgonzalez@fultonscienceacademy.org

As with any novel, there are key limitations to note which restrict the audience to a certain group. Since this piece contains numerous mentions of graphic imagery or disturbing scenes, it may be best for individuals who do not prefer to read about such topics to avoid this book. Furthermore, to expand on the group of people which this book is most likely to best appeal to, lovers of non-fiction and scientific analysis are sure to find this piece intriguing and may even want to further research this topic. The reading level which this book falls under is advanced; this means that readers who have strong, developed reading comprehension and implication analysis skills will find this book most easy to understand; this includes most ages fourteen and up.

Conclusion

To give final thoughts, Isha Patkar and Dayanna Gonzalez both strongly recommend this book to all individuals who are interested in deep psychology and the breakdown of the personality and tendencies of an individual. We feel that the beginning of the book proved to be more difficult than books we had previously read in the past, but once we moved past this, the thoughts of the author were riveting, making the book difficult to put down. We both saw the world from a new perspective which enhanced our knowledge on the concept behind human cruelty, an otherwise under discussed topic. We also thought the definition of evil defined throughout this book was concise. The book offers a new way of thinking about evil, taking into account the perspective and story of those people considered evil. The main points of the book are interesting and important, and while the beginning of the book depicts graphic violence or lack of empathy, the book the information at the end of the book connects all the examples to give us a full picture of Baron-Cohen's theory.

References

- [1] Simon Baren-Cohen. *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*. Basic Books, May 2011.