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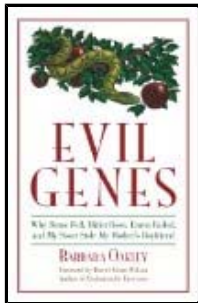
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### Review: Evil Genes



#### [Evil Genes](#)

Why Rome Fell, Hitler Rose, Enron Failed and My Sister Stole My Mother's Boyfriend  
by Barbara Oakley

The product of the author's quest to understand the nature of evil people, both the Machiavellian despots on the world stage and the tyrants in her own family, this book probes the psychological, sociological and genetic roots of chronically malevolent behavior.

A popular science text that melds scientific research with family history, [Evil Genes](#) probes scientific literature for evidence supporting her theory that evil in some people results from an inherent dysfunction.

Where do the roots of evil lie? In what genes is it manifest? Like autism, there is some evidence that a genetically based brain development disorder can lead to self-righteous behaviors in utter disregard for the welfare of others. But the genetics are far too complex and the influence of social, developmental and environmental factors too varied, to predict where or when evil or psychopathic behavior will occur.

Alternating between the story of her dysfunctional family and a wide-ranging look at evil characters — Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, Slobodan Milosevic, among others — the author weaves her way through psychopathy, genetics, medical imaging, narcissism, evolution and genius in a quixotic pursuit of certainty and definition.

How can you tell if a public figure is potentially evil?

*“The best an ordinary person can do is to try to lay aside his or her own ideological blinkers and look honestly at public figures. If a given individual seems most interested in villifying others, proceeds to characterize his own in-group as having been unduly victimized, is ruthlessly vindictive, and finally, is discovered to have cozy, self-serving financial deals, there are reasonable grounds to assume that a person is more than a little Machiavellian and that his or her leadership may be aimed more toward self*

*than public service. Unfortunately, our own tendency, at least regarding leaders who purport to share our ideology, is to avoid looking too closely.”*

[Evil Genes](#) concludes with textbook-style discussion questions (“For Pondering”) that recap the issues:

- Do you think that you interact with people differently because of your own past experiences with the “successfully sinister?”
- Do you see Machiavellian traits in yourself? Are they healthy? How would you know?
- Someday dictators will have access to technology to have themselves cloned, allowing for an endless procession of “mini-me’s.” What effect might this have on evil dictatorships of the future?

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**M T W T F S S**

1 [2](#) 3

4 5 6 7 8 9 [10](#)

11 12 [13](#) 14 15 16 17

18 19 20 21 22 23 24

25 26 27 28 29 30 31

• [« Jul](#)

M T W T F S S

[« Jul](#)

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- [August 2008](#)
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- [November 2007](#)
- [October 2007](#)
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- [August 2007](#)
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