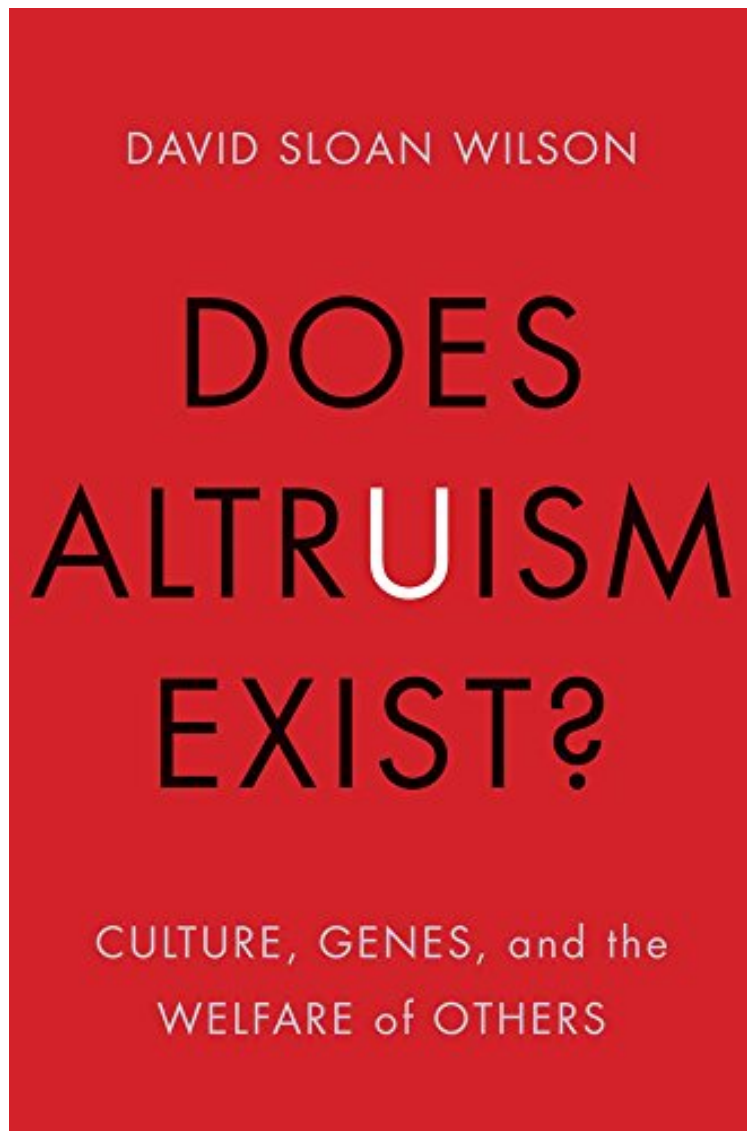


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David Sloan Wilson

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76.Mb

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By LAFAs a student of economics and business, I knew little of the topic discussed by David Wilson. His provocative, well reasoned explanations were at first difficult for me to grasp, but as I followed through his explanations it was as if a new view of the world emerged. I definitely plan to read more of his books.
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By Robert J. Barnett, Jr. Wilson once again makes the case for group selection as an evolutionary process and includes an angry response to Dawkin's etal. continued preference for individual selection. Rereading *The Selfish Gene* and then *Does Altruism Exist?* makes for a rewarding study.
1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A masterpiece of scientific literature, and the best book available on altruism
By Barbara A. Oakley
I've wondered about altruism for decades--this, at long last, is the book I've been searching for to help me better understand how to truly help others. David Sloan Wilson is a remarkable scientist, and here he is in top form in framing the vital issue of altruism in paradigm-shifting fashion. This elegant, concise volume contains many surprises. Its not commonly known, for example, that religions do NOT generally draw on altruism at the level of thoughts and feelings to motivate peoples altruism. Instead, religions promote altruism through actions. (p. 89) In other words, the old saying Its the thought that counts gets things backwards. Careful research, well-explained by Wilsons to-the-point descriptions, reveals that its the act that counts. (Let that be a lesson to us.) Wilson approaches his understanding of altruism through the prism of evolutionary theory, which provides a dramatic, scientifically grounded new perspective. This is important often, we imagine we know what works in helping others, and so we set up frameworks for examining altruism that serve as a bulwark for our own beliefs. Evolutionary theory provides a much broader, and in surprising ways, more compassionate way of viewing and understanding altruism that also allows us to form models of practical, workable, organism level (p. 144) altruism. In fact, approaching matters through evolutionary perspectives can allow us to see symbolic thought itself as a nongenetic inheritance system (pp. 54-56). August Comte coined the word altruism in the mid-1800s while he was trying to create a moral system without belief in God. As Wilson notes apropos Comte: Happiness and progress were a matter of promoting universal altruism through a purely scientific religion of humanity. (p. 90). Comtes experiment, sadly, was a failure. This isnt at all to say that religion is the sine qua non for altruism but rather, that there is something deeper than meets the eye in social structures that promote altruism. These deeper than meets the eye aspects of altruism are carefully explored in the 150 beautifully written pages of this book. We get a succinct and pithy overview of one of evolutionary biologys long-time controversiesthat of group selection. As Wilson neatly summarizes: Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups. Everything else is commentary. (p. 23). The wonderfully consilient scientific paradigm of equivalence is put forth to help explain the controversy. It seems in science that some seemingly divergent perspectives can ultimately be proven to be different sides of the same coin. This book leaves us with an outstanding framework to help us understand one of the greatest issues of modern times how to organize societies, and not necessarily from top down, so they function well at larger and larger scales. Wilson asks in the title of his provocative volume *Does Altruism Exist?* I think youll be more than satisfied with his answer.

A powerful treatise that demonstrates the existence of altruism in nature, with surprising implications for human society *Does altruism exist? Or is human nature entirely selfish?* In this eloquent and accessible book, famed biologist David Sloan Wilson provides new answers to this age-old question based on the latest developments in evolutionary science. From an evolutionary viewpoint, Wilson argues, altruism is inextricably linked to the functional organization of groups. Groups that work undeniably exist in nature and human society, although special conditions are required for their evolution. Humans are one of the most groupish species on earth, in some ways comparable to social insect colonies and multi-cellular organisms. The case that altruism evolves in all social species is surprisingly simple to make. Yet the implications for human society are far from obvious. Some of the most venerable criteria for defining altruism arent worth caring much about, any more than we care much whether we are paid by cash or check. Altruism defined in terms of thoughts and feelings is notably absent from religion, even though altruism defined in terms of action is notably present. The economic case for selfishness can be decisively rejected. The quality of everyday life depends critically on people who overtly care about the welfare of others. Yet, like any other adaptation, altruism can have pathological manifestations. Wilson concludes by showing how a social theory that goes beyond altruism by focusing on group function can help to improve the human condition.

[A] brilliant contribution to this branch of socio-political discourse. Herbert Gintis, *Nature*