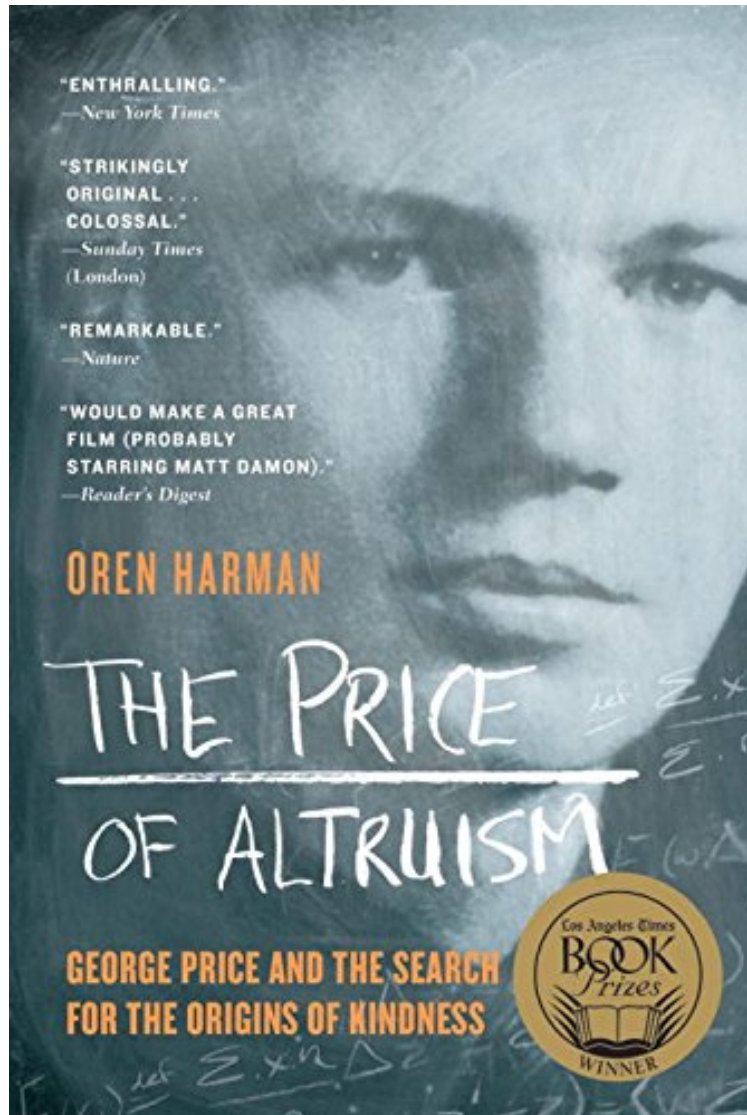


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# The Price of Altruism: George Price and the Search for the Origins of Kindness

Oren Harman

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#792608 in Books Oren Harman 2011-06-20Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.20 x 1.20 x 5.60l, .84 #File Name: 0393339998451 pagesThe Price of Altruism George Price and the Search for the Origins of Kindness | File size: 24.Mb

**Oren Harman : The Price of Altruism: George Price and the Search for the Origins of Kindness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Price of Altruism: George Price and the Search for the Origins of Kindness:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A tremendous accomplishment and a great read, about a complex

man and his flaws. By Pharmer Tom It would take hours to do justice reviewing this book. Although the cover indicates it is primarily about George Price and his work, it is in fact a sweeping discussion of the development of the theory of altruism and the many well known scientists involved in its development. You will find discussions about Darwin, Huxley, R.A. Fischer, JBS Haldane and many others and their contribution to the theory. As a biology and statistics major (way back in the 70's), I was blown away by the breadth of this book. If you want greater depth into the story, the copious endnotes give you a great starting point. The key role of George Price in developing a mathematical expression for explaining altruism covers approx. the last fifth of the book, although he makes appearances thru-out the book, interacting with some of the greatest minds in genetics, theoretical biology, computer science, statistics and more. A tremendous accomplishment and a great read. edit: sorry - last fifth of book concerns the last years of Price's life, his contribution to the mathematical theory of altruism comes earlier. 32 of 33 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating book - reads like a mystery By Mark Shulman If you like Simon Singh Malcolm Gladwell and Sylvia Nasar you must read this book! Harman is able to combine Singh's ability to make complicated science accessible and interesting, Gladwell's skill in telling a captivating story and Nasar's talent for bringing a person back to life - all in one book. The Price of Altruism is not simply a biography of a genius, but also a fascinating tale that charts the quest to answer one of the biggest hurdles evolution had to overcome - why would an animal act kindly to another unrelated animal in a world of 'survival of the fittest?' The biggest appeal for me in the book was that Harman was able not only to tell how masterminds all over the world pondered the problem of kindness (and what they discovered!) but at the same time explains their science and showcases their personality. I recommended the book to all my friends this year. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A scholarly and human achievement of the first order! By Menachem Fisch Since Kuhn, the history of science has lost sight of the individual, and is largely told as the history of theories, institutions, or collectives. If, as Kuhn so forcefully taught, it is impossible to reason across the incommensurable divides between successive scientific paradigms, then it becomes impossible to make sense of the work and thinking of the individuals who not only straddled those divides, but were instrumental in creating them. Scientific biographies are held to inevitably lose sight of the broader developments in science, and, for the same reason, studies of those developments are held to inevitably lose sight of the individuals who made them possible. Oren Harman's masterful *The Price of Altruism*, not only succeeds in doing both - telling the moving and tragic story of George Price's life, while relating the dramatic story of the search for a scientifically viable account of the evolution of altruism - but in doing so exemplifies beautifully how greater the combined sum is of its separate parts. A gripping tale, extraordinarily well-written, whose historiographical importance far exceeds its two-fold subject matter.

Enthralling. Frans de Waal, *The New York Times Book Review* *Survival of the fittest or survival of the nicest?* Since the dawn of time man has contemplated the mystery of altruism, but it was Darwin who posed the question most starkly. From the selfless ant to the stinging bee to the man laying down his life for a stranger, evolution has yielded a goodness that in theory should never be. Set against the sweeping tale of 150 years of scientific attempts to explain kindness, *The Price of Altruism* tells for the first time the moving story of the eccentric American genius George Price (1922-1975), as he strives to answer evolution's greatest riddle. An original and penetrating picture of twentieth century thought, it is also a deeply personal journey. From the heights of the Manhattan Project to the inspired equation that explains altruism to the depths of homelessness and despair, Price's life embodies the paradoxes of Darwin's enigma. His tragic suicide in a squatters flat, among the vagabonds to whom he gave all his possessions, provides the ultimate contemplation on the possibility of genuine benevolence. 24 black-and-white illustrations

From *Publishers Weekly* With his new book, Harman (*The Man Who Invented the Chromosome*) examines Price, a scientist and author whose promising life ended in self-destruction. Harman didn't set out to write a straightforward biography, but rather a history of Price's lifelong quest to understand evolution and the origins of altruism; along those lines the author includes the life and work of "Orwellian" psychologist B.F. Skinner, J.B.S. Haldane, and "the most distinguished Darwinian since Darwin," Bill Hamilton, who would become a close colleague of Price's. But it's Price's tale that grounds Harman's book. Part One focuses on the man's early life in Minneapolis, his marriage and divorce to Julia Madigan, with whom he had two daughters, and his later life in New York City, where he held countless jobs as he tried to get published. In November 1967 Price moved to London, determined to "crack the problem of altruism," and Part Two picks up there, with his conversion to Christianity, after which he gave away his possessions and dedicated himself to helping London's homeless, until he eventually joined their ranks. In 1975, just after Christmas, he took his own life. Harman has given voice to the professional contributions and personal struggles of a man whose body lies today in an unmarked grave in North London. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. [E]nthralling.... Extremely well researched and written with great love of the subject, *The Price of Altruism* reveals all sorts of personal details of momentous events in the history of science.... This is a book for anyone interested in the question, first posed by Darwin himself, of how we ended up with so much kindness in a natural world customarily depicted as 'red in tooth and claw.' Price struggled with it on an intensely personal level. His story is highly relevant at a time when greed as the basis of society has lost much of its appeal. - Frans de Waal,

The New York Times Book Review would make a great film (probably starring Matt Damon). - Reader's Digest [A] rich and vigorous survey of the controversy over altruism and its evolutionary role, stretching from the 19th century to now. - Sunday Times [UK] Ever since Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution in 1859, scientists have wondered whether it can explain the existence of altruism. Price wanted to describe mathematically how a genetic disposition to altruism could evolve. As Mr. Harman so vividly describes, Price ultimately became one of the vagabonds he set out to save. - The Economist I stayed up a good part of the night reading... fascinating! - Sylvia Nasar, author of A Beautiful Mind A masterfully told story... This book is in the same class as Sylvia Nasar's A Beautiful Mind. - Library Journal The Price of Altruism puts Price's work into a wide scientific and social context, showing real insight into its importance and genuine sympathy for the tale of his life. - Steve Jones, New Scientist Brilliant... A great story. - Brian Appleyard, Literary Remarkable... fascinating. - The Big Issue Fascinating.... Important... full of complex and deeply interesting ideas. - Sam Leith, The Spectator Uncommonly brilliant and deeply stimulating... almost cinematically satisfying. Harman has a rare gift for bringing ideas and thinkers to life. - Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of The New Republic A brilliant biography of a brilliant man. A powerful page-turner that vividly renders the obsessive absorption with the poles of cooperation and competition in nature. - Daniel Kevles, Stanley Woodward Professor of History at Yale University This book is a stunning tour de force. The puzzle of altruism is revealed as it would be in a thriller, with twists and turns and surprises almost until the end. - Noah Feldman, Bemis Professor of Law, Harvard University A terrific book, at once scholarly and impossible to put down. - Peter Godfrey-Smith, professor of philosophy at Harvard University Oren Harman's compelling new book explores one of the key questions of our era: what are the origins of altruism? A little known mathematician lies at the heart of the story. George Price recognized that acts of kindness and self-sacrifice stood blatantly opposed to most of the principles of modern Darwinism. Harman's wide-ranging intellectual quest brings this shy, anguished, and fascinating man alive with style and passion, and reminds us of the powerful emotions that can fuel great scientific achievement. - Janet Browne, author of Charles Darwin In this remarkable book, Oren Harman tracks George Price, an awkward, disturbed, and profoundly, almost saintly scientist.... It is an astonishing story at every level, from the destitute wanderings and genial interventions of Price to a revealing account of how modern evolutionary biology took its contemporary form. - Peter Galison, Pellegrino University Professor of the History of Science and Physics, Harvard University An intriguing history for serious students of the history of science. - Kirkus s About the Author Oren Harman, who has a doctorate from Oxford University, is the Chair of the Graduate Program in Science Technology and Society at Bar Ilan University and a professor of the history of science. He is the author of The Man Who Invented the Chromosome, a documentary film maker, and a frequent contributor to The New Republic. He lives in Tel Aviv and New York.