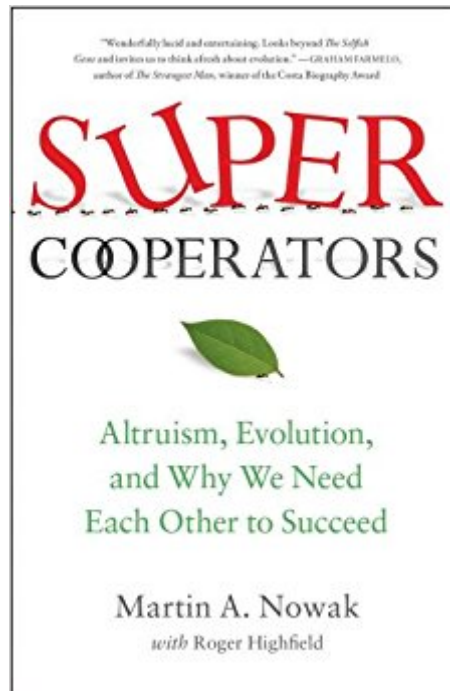


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SuperCooperators: Altruism, Evolution, And Why We Need Each Other To Succeed



Synopsis

EVOLUTION IS OFTEN PRESENTED AS A STRICTLY COMPETITIVE ENDEAVOR. This point of view has had serious implications for the way we see the mechanics of both science and culture. But scientists have long wondered how societies could have evolved without some measure of cooperation. And if there was cooperation involved, how could it have arisen from nature's tooth and claw? Martin Nowak, one of the world's experts on evolution and game theory, working here with bestselling science writer Roger Highfield, turns an important aspect of evolutionary theory on its head to explain why cooperation, not competition, has always been the key to the evolution of complexity. He offers a new explanation for the origin of life and a new theory for the origins of language, biology's second greatest information revolution after the emergence of genes. SuperCooperators also brings to light his game-changing work on disease. Cancer is fundamentally a failure of the body's cells to cooperate, Nowak has discovered, but organs are cleverly designed to foster cooperation, and he explains how this new understanding can be used in novel cancer treatments. Nowak and Highfield examine the phenomena of reciprocity, reputation, and reward, explaining how selfless behavior arises naturally from competition; how forgiveness, generosity, and kindness have a mathematical rationale; how companies can be better designed to promote cooperation; and how there is remarkable overlap between the recipe for cooperation that arises from quantitative analysis and the codes of conduct seen in major religions, such as the Golden Rule. In his first book written for a wide audience, this hugely influential scientist explains his cutting-edge research into the mysteries of cooperation, from the rise of multicellular life to Good Samaritans. With wit and clarity, Nowak and Highfield make the case that cooperation, not competition, is the defining human trait. SuperCooperators will expand our understanding of evolution and provoke debate for years to come.

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Customer Reviews

I read a lot, but I rarely suggest books to people I am acquainted with (you know, people get sick of that sort of thing); however, since I finished reading this book, I can honestly say that this is the one volume I have actually recommended to my friends and family. This book covers a crucial aspect of our modern life and is far-and-away one of the most indispensable pieces of scientific writing I have read to date. For example, take this quote from the Preface: "Many problems that challenge us today can be traced back to a profound tension between what is good and desirable for society as a whole and what is good and desirable for an individual. That conflict can be found in global problems such as climate change, pollution, resource depletion, poverty, hunger, and overpopulation. The biggest issues of all - saving the planet and maximizing the collective lifetime of the species Homo sapiens - cannot be solved by technology alone. They require novel ways for us to work in harmony. If we are to continue to thrive, we have but one option. We now have to manage the planet as a whole. If we are to win the struggle for existence, and avoid a precipitous fall, there's no choice but to harness this extraordinary creative force. We now have to refine and to extend our ability to cooperate. We must become familiar with the science of cooperation. Now, more than ever, the world needs SuperCooperators." One reviewer called Martin Nowak a virtuoso, this is most certainly true, and it may even be an understatement. It would seem that Dr. Nowak has his hands in nearly every discipline and knows nearly everyone who is anyone in the scientific community.

For Martin Nowak cooperation is the master architect of evolution. This man is obsessed with the idea that cooperation is an indispensable driving force of evolution at any level - mutation, selection and cooperation. Without cooperation among RNAs in the primordial soup, you and me would be still one of them. Is he crazy? Nowak has been Professor of Mathematical Biology at Oxford, the

first head of the Program in Theoretical Biology at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, and now he is full professor of Biology and Mathematics at Harvard University in his own institute called "Nowakia". Of his numerous papers more than 50 were published in Nature or Science. Nowak is a leading evolutionary theorist of our time. Why is he crazy for cooperation? Cooperation has always been Nowak's main subject that he studies mostly with only one technique: mathematics. "We can capture the way it (evolution) works with mathematics, distilling its essence into the form of equations." "SuperCooperators" is the grand review of his oeuvre on cooperation, a kind of textbook that reads like a bestselling novel with a wonderfully lucid and enthusiastic style, thanks to Nowak's ghost-writer and kind of co-author ("with" instead of "and") Roger Highfield, an ingenious science writer and the editor of the New Scientist magazine. A layperson could enjoy just reading this book and finally has happened to learn most about a fascinating part of biology. Imagine all textbooks were written this way! Try this appetizer from the chapter on the evolution of language: "Gossip. Banter. Chat. Let's talk. Let's organize a colloquium. Even better, let's have a party! Language allows people to work together, to exchange their ideas, their thoughts, and their dreams.

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