

## Podcast: Evolution of altruism — If evolution favors the survival of the fittest, how did humans gain compassion and empathy?

We often talk about evolution in terms of competition, as the survival of the fittest. But if it is, then where did the widespread (and widely admired) impulse to help others even at great cost to ourselves come from? In this episode, [Stephanie Preston](#), a professor of psychology and head of the Ecological Neuroscience Lab at the University of Michigan, talks about the evolutionary, neurological and behavioral foundations for altruism with our new co-host, the astrophysicist and author [Janna Levin](#).

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**LEVIN:** Now, do you think that as a species, we are indeed altruistic?

**PRESTON:** Oh, for sure. Yeah. In tiny ways to huge ways, every day. I think we're part of a social species, which depends upon altruism to help us stay coordinated and bring us all the benefits that we need to make it through this life.

**LEVIN:** Are we unique in displaying altruism among species? Is this something we share with other mammals? Or even other species that are not mammals?

**PRESTON:** Yeah, it's not unique at all. In the book and in my work with Frans de Waal, we have talked a lot about this. What is unique, perhaps, is the way in which humans want to sit around and think about it, or they could like cogitate for a really long time about the pros and cons. That's not something another species is probably doing.

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