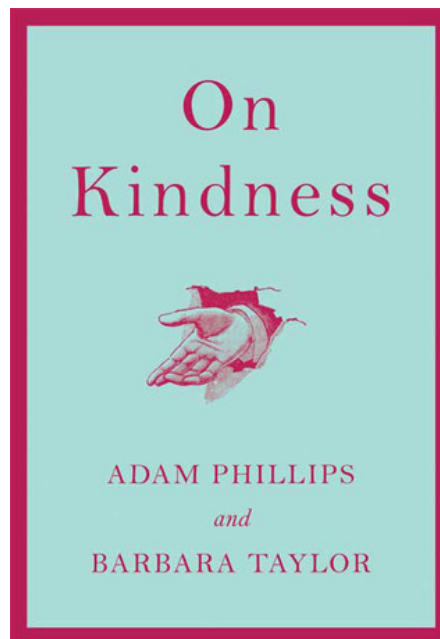




On Kindness

Adam Phillips , Barbara Taylor

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Kindness is the foundation of the world's great religions and most-enduring philosophies. Why, then, does being kind feel so dangerous? If we crave kindness with such intensity, why is it a pleasure we often deny ourselves? And why—despite our longing—are we often suspicious when we are on the receiving end of it?

In this brilliant book, the eminent psychoanalyst Adam Phillips and the historian Barbara Taylor examine the pleasures and perils of kindness. Modern people have been taught to perceive ourselves as fundamentally antagonistic to one another, our motives self-seeking. Drawing on intellectual history, literature, psychoanalysis, and contemporary social theory, this book explains how and why we have chosen loneliness over connection. *On Kindness* argues that a life lived in instinctive, sympathetic identification with others is the one we should allow ourselves to live.

Bursting with often shocking insight, this brief and essential book will return to its readers what Marcus Aurelius declared was mankind's "greatest delight": the intense satisfactions of generosity and compassion.

On Kindness Details

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From Reader Review On Kindness for online ebook

Richard says

Dear Dominick,

I read this book because of you.

I'm not always as kind as I would like to be, sometimes because I think it's funny to be crusty, sometimes because a certain harshness is the protective candy coating that hides my vulnerability.

Anyway, you have many lovely qualities, but I have been especially touched by your kindness.

So I'm giving you this book not because I think you need its insights (although it is kind of insightful), but as a token of the change you have inspired in me - and, I'm sure, many others.

Sincerely, your friend,

Richard

(--- I also will say that I found this book a bit dry and obsessed w Freud, but if it had been more touchy-feely I probably would have resisted it more)

Marjanne says

This book was interesting, but not completely what I was hoping for. I liked that the authors discussed why kindness in our current society is difficult, overlooked, and underappreciated. However, they spent way too much time talking about the psychotherapy's take on kindness. This pretty much only proved my thoughts that Freud thought that everything is about sex. I don't agree, and I kind of felt like I was wasting my time reading about psychotherapy semantics. The authors did have the occasional good insight. I agree that kindness is often viewed as a weakness. That society laments the lack of kindness in society but few people are willing to make it a habit or make it a more respected value. I appreciate the value these author's place on kindness and I ended up with a couple of good quotes in spite of the fact that this book didn't thrill me.

Tom says

from KCPL, due 2009.1209 returned

This book is a bit too cerebral for my taste. Still plan to finish it, though.

It seems to me that kindness is very simple, arising from the insight that there is no separation or essential difference between this and that, that all arises in awareness as part of awareness. Kindness is an expression of the natural acceptance that awareness extends to itself, leading to the mutuality of the golden rule -- treating the apparent other as one would want to be treated, because the one and the other are not different, but of a kind.

Okay, I skipped a bit of the penultimate chapter when it bogged down in abstract musings over the sexuality of kindness, the aggressiveness of sexuality, and the kindness of aggression. The last chapter has more musing and psychoanalytic hand-wringing over the ambiguity of human motivation and the bleakness of evolutionary thought.

At the end of the book, I don't much care for the story Phillips and Taylor tell. I find it too complex yet ultimately unedifying. Here's a story I like better:

Kindness is a natural human impulse that springs from awareness' warm recognition of kinship with all that enters its range. For a variety of reasons, humans often choose to suppress this natural impulse, but they can also choose to nurture and cultivate it. When we do, we discover that little is as rewarding or satisfying as mutual regard shared with other sentient beings. Why is this? Who knows? Who cares? It's enough to recognize that this is in the nature of human life is and to gratefully accept the nourishment available to us in this way.

Autumn says

"Kindness, one could say, complicates one's relations with others in peculiarly subtle and satisfying ways and for a very simple reason. Acts of kindness demonstrate, in the clearest possible way, that we are vulnerable and dependent animals, who have no better resource than each other. If kindness previously had to be legitimized by a God or by gods, or located in women and children, it is because it has had to be delegated - and sanctioned, and sacralized, and idealized, and sentimentalized - because it comes from the part of ourselves that we are most disturbed by; the part that knows how much assurance and (genuine) reassurance is required to sustain our sense of viability. Our resistance to kindness is our resistance to encountering what kindness meets in us, and what we meet in other people by being kind to them."

Amin Rigi says

"The self without sympathetic attachments is either a fiction or a lunatic."
? Adam Phillips, On Kindness

I've been reading Adam Phillips for a while now. Phillips is incredibly careful with his choices of words. Through his writing we often see expressions like 'I want to suggest', 'I have proposition', 'if', 'it is as though', 'it is as if', and many more instances like these. Why I pointed this out? I want to say that Phillips doesn't simply say something with certainty.

In other words, when he says 'the self without sympathetic attachments is either a fiction or a lunatic' without using any words that implies uncertainty, he is 100% certain ? based on 40 years of clinical practices.

In this book, Phillips and Taylor, investigate the history and psychology of kindness. They conclude that kindness is an essential element of a healthy life. This book, also, is an attempt to revive the message of the prophet of the kindness, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In our era of toxic rivalry, kindness is a map that leads us to a life worth living.

I finish with another quote from this book:

"Everybody is vulnerable at every stage of their lives; everybody is subject to illness, accident, personal

tragedy, political and economic reality... This doesn't mean that people aren't resourceful. Bearing other people's vulnerability ?which means sharing in it imaginatively and practically without needing to get rid of it? entails being able to bear one's own."

? Adam Phillips, On Kindness

Mrs Froggy says

I feel divided regarding this book.

The first three chapters are really interesting, but as soon Freud was mentioned I lost my interest in what I read. I began to pay attention again when I moved to the last chapter.

I think I was looking for something more inspiring. Also this book with its dry style didn't give me any particular insight on kindness and left me with a feeling that it lost its chance.

Gail says

Truly a book for this moment. Brilliant prose. At the dark black heart of all the birthers and deathers out there is nice little knot of all-American selfishness. The belief that if we just all look out for ourselves it all works out just fine. Phillips, hearkening back to the Stoics, Rousseau, Freud, Humes, Smith, and other thinkers, reminds us that it is our connection to others that makes us human.

Bruce Reiter says

Liked the first part discussing the historical significance of kindness versus the egoists. Enjoyed the last part projecting kindness into a modern framework. Didn't really need the middle section with all of the psychoanalytical whoop de do but the book is well worth the read, particularly in today's political and economic climates. Kindness is not for losers, despite what Mr. Trump and his minions believe.

Ngiste says

The history of kindness was interesting and insightful. The rest relied far too heavily on psychoanalysis and Freudian theory, which is just a bunch of unsubstantiated explanations with little value outside of BSing a term paper. I would have rather seen a comprehensive review of literature and peer reviewed studies on kindness and how it manifests itself, how we justify it, and how we value it.

Jeff says

For those who have been through analysis, On Kindness makes a good case for the salience of this word within the accounts we continue to make of ourselves. At least two chapters are intellectual history; at least

two read Freud in relation to Winnicott, no great surprise to fans of Adam Phillips, who goes around and around at times to evade criticizing Freud, but for whose ideas there would be no need for this book. Freud doesn't talk about kindness, and it takes a therapist to wonder why, a historian (Taylor) to talk about why it might matter.

Frank says

I loved this book. Offers an account of kindness as not merely a virtue, but a pleasure. Brilliant account of how reductive and cynical psychoanalytic theory can distort our emotional lives. And, best of all, ties together the personal analysis into a political account of how unkindness is expressed in neoliberal policies.

Ronald Koltnow says

Kindness is very important to me. I even have a friend named Kindness. In Phillips and Taylor's study of the meaning and roots of kindness, a dichotomy is defined: Kindness requires a level of vulnerability, an opening up of oneself, which we are not always willing to do. Yet, performing acts of kindness makes us feel good, about ourselves, about others. We expect to be treated kindly but are sometimes afraid (yes, that's the word) to open ourselves up. The authors trace kindness through biology, religion, philosophy, psychology, and contemporary mores. Those who expect a touchy-feely, ain't life grand approach will be in for a shock. This is a thought-provoking, honest assessment of a complex emotion. Some say kindness is innate (the same can be said for hostility), the religious say that it is imbued by god, the Freudians say that kindness is a form of blackmail we use to get what we want, and the contemporary rat-race says that kindness is a form of weakness. Phillips and Taylor do come down on the side of being kind, if for no other reason than it is better than the alternative, but the case is clear that kindness is sometimes a two-edged sword. This is a short book to be read slowly and savored. I will read another Phillips book soon.

Becky says

Much heavier than I expected, this book took me an age to make my way through. I read the kindle edition, and wonder if the physical book may have offered some better cues to changes in perspective and theme. I felt like I was sometimes thrown into a new school of thought with no warning.

I may have to reread this one to make more sense of it.

William2 says

I dislike this book. When I first started reading it I noticed that there was absolutely no mention of Eastern conceptions of compassion and kindness. That's fine, I thought, it's a short book. I really enjoyed the section titled A Short History of Kindness. But everything that follows is steeped in Freudian claptrap. And it just goes on and on and on. The book is only 114 pages long and I stopped at 60. Instinctually, I think Freud is horseshit. The man's theories in no way correspond to how I view my life. My kindness for others, sorry Mr. Phillips, is in no way part of my sexuality. It is Eastern in its basic nature, it abjures the ego, and is at the heart of all that makes my life wonderful. I refuse to bemberde it with psychoanalytic pettifoggery. One final

note: in all of the blurbage, or paratext as Dr. Eco would call it, for this book not once does the word Freud occur. Now, why is that, do you think?

NOT recommended.

Norma J. says

Pure hope.
