



On Kindness

By 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.

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On Kindness By Adam Phillips, Barbara Taylor Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

To live the successful modern life, we are enjoined to become less kind and more selfish. That is this small but profound volume's animating premise. Phillips and Taylor argue that in today's fast-paced, anything-to-get-ahead culture, kindness "has become our forbidden pleasure." Kindly behavior is perceived as both dangerous and suspicious, nothing less than empty sentiment and simplistic moralizing. Most of all, kindness is taken as a sign of weakness. Though written by a historian and psychoanalyst, *On Kindness* wears its erudition lightly and with great grace. It looks at attitudes toward kindness from a historical perspective, from the Stoics to Christian thought; to Hobbes, Hume, Adam Smith, and Rousseau; to Freud; and to the current day. For centuries, people thought of themselves as being naturally kind. Phillips and Taylor explore the various ways in which that attitude changed over the centuries and also comment on the often devastating and tragic consequences of that change, of "how in giving up on kindness, we deprive ourselves of a pleasure that is fundamental to our well being." --June Sawyers

Review

Praise for *On Kindness*

"If we have all become more self-interested and self-serving, Phillips and Taylor suggest a little more altruism as an antidote to angst and alienation . . . Theirs is a true tract for difficult times." —Iain Finlayson, *The Times* (London)

"Part of the purpose of this short book is to reinstate [kindness] as something necessary both to our personal happiness and our communal well-being. This seems to me a totally admirable aim . . . A concentrated essay on a limited but deeply important subject is to be highly valued." —Mary Warnock, *The Observer* (London)

"[An] elegant meditation on kindness . . . In a competitive, stressed-out, paranoid, cynical, celebrity-obsessed, credit-crunched society, this might seem a barmy philosophy. As Phillips and Taylor show—clearly, coherently and completely unsentimentally—it's a completely sensible one." —David Robinson, *The Scotsman*

Praise for Adam Phillips

"[Phillips is] one of the finest prose stylists at work in the language, an Emerson of our time." —John Banville

"The curious thing about reading Phillips is that he makes you feel smart and above the daily grind at the same time as he reassures you that you are not alone in your primal anxieties about whether you are lovable or nuts or, perhaps, merely boring." —Daphne Merkin, *The New York Times Magazine*

"Phillips is . . . a bit like an Oliver Sacks of psychoanalysis, both affable and unalarmed." —Gail Caldwell, *The Boston Sunday Globe*

Praise for Barbara Taylor

"[*Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*] will be essential reading for many years to come . . . Superb . . . Well-written." —Caroline Franklin, *The Times Literary Supplement*

About the Author

Adam Phillips, formerly Principle Child Psychotherapist at Charing Cross Hospital, London, is a practising psychoanalyst and a visiting professor in the English department at the University of York. He is the author of numerous works of psychoanalysis and literary criticism, including most recently *Unforbidden Pleasures*, and *Missing Out*. He is General Editor of the Penguin Modern Classics Freud translations, and a Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Adam Whittington:

The book *On Kindness* can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. So just why must we leave the good thing like a book *On Kindness*? A few of you have a different opinion about book. But one aim which book can give many info for us. It is absolutely correct. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or data that you take for that, you may give for each other; it is possible to share all of these. Book *On Kindness* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and massive function for you. You can appearance the enormous world by wide open and read a reserve. So it is very wonderful.

Barbie Brookins:

Reading a guide tends to be new life style within this era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information which will give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world can share their idea. Publications can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire their own reader with their story or their experience. Not only the storyplot that share in the books. But also they write about the data about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your children, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their expertise in writing, they also doing some research before they write to their book. One of them is this *On Kindness*.

Frank Bullard:

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Paula Salas:

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