

Why Be Kind? Some Claims for Reflection

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Kindness is singular.

“Kindness is singular in both senses of the word: something unique, and something remarkable.”

“It’s important that we work to understand the singularity of kindness, lest we fail to appreciate its special moral value.”

“In whatever gesture it finds expression, kindness enacts and affirms the worth of its recipients. In whatever gesture it finds expression, kindness is fundamentally ameliorative.”

Kindness involves a delicate balance between love and respect.

“Kindness, like moral friendship, involves a careful balancing of love and respect, of approach and retreat, of intervening and letting be, but where it errs, *it errs on the side of love*. Better to do too much than too little. Better too risk offense than to leave another without the help and support she needs.”

Kindness involves vulnerability, and therefore requires moral courage.

“There is something about kindness that terrifies us.”

“Kindness [...] presumes the vulnerability and need that we find terrifying; that we devote so much time and attention to trying to evade; that we deny in our culturally-sacred up-by-the-bootstraps myth.”

“Kindness [...] reminds us that in a world that is not up to us, we absolutely *need* each other.”

Kindness is the antipode of entitlement, and may be the antidote to entitlement.

“[E]ntitlement arises more or less unconsciously in response to changing circumstances—circumstances over which we have little or no control.”

“I suggest that we begin by assuming that we all embody entitlement at least some of the time, and actively attend to our behaviors— how we look at others, how we move, how we speak, how much we speak and what we say and to whom and when— and reflect on the attitudes that those might entail.”

“Embodying kindness means more than occasionally doing something that might be called kind for another person; kindness is a way of being in the world and moving through the world.”

The loss of an opportunity to show kindness is a loss of love worth mourning. We must be kind to ourselves as well as to others.

“As we learn to care for and nurture and lift up and speak kindly to others, we must learn to care for and nurture and lift up and speak kindly to ourselves. When we do, we enable our own kindness.”