

*Passage 1: David Brooks argues that kindness is innate.*

- 1 The story of evolution, we have been told, is the story of the survival of the fittest. The strong eat the weak. The creatures that adapt to the environment pass on their selfish genes. Those that do not become extinct. In this telling, we humans are like all other animals — deeply and thoroughly selfish. We spend our time trying to maximise our outcomes — competing for status, wealth and mating opportunities. Behaviour that seems altruistic is really self-interest in disguise. Charity and fellowship are the cultural drapery atop the iron logic of nature. 5
- 2 All this is partially true, of course. Yet every day, it seems, a book crosses my desk, emphasising a different side of the story. These are books about sympathy, empathy, cooperation and collaboration, written by scientists, evolutionary psychologists, neuroscientists and others. It seems there has been a shift among those who study this ground, yielding a more nuanced, and often gentler picture of our nature. In pursuing our self-interested goals, we often have an incentive to repay kindness with kindness, so others will do us favours when we are in need. We have an incentive to establish a reputation for niceness, so people will want to work with us. We have an incentive to work in teams, even against our short-term self-interest because cohesive groups thrive. 10
- 3 But beyond incentives, we might even be born to be good. It has been observed that at an astonishingly early age kids begin to help others, and to share information, in ways that adult chimps hardly ever do. Somehow, the human mind veered away from that of the other primates and we are born ready to cooperate with innate mechanisms of empathy and connection – things like smiles, blushes, laughter and touch. When friends laugh together, their laughs start out as separate vocalisations, but they merge and become intertwined sounds. It now seems as though laughter evolved millions of years ago, long before language, as a mechanism to build cooperation. It is one of the many tools in our inborn toolbox of collaboration. 15 20
- 4 Natural selection takes place not only when individuals compete with other individuals, but also when groups compete with other groups. Both competitions are examples of the survival of the fittest, but when groups compete, it is the cohesive and internally altruistic groups that win and pass on their genes. Human beings are “the giraffes of altruism.” Just as giraffes have long necks to help them survive, humans developed moral minds that help them and their groups succeed. Humans build moral communities out of shared norms, habits, emotions and gods, and then will fight and even sometimes die to defend their communities. 25
- 5 If cooperation permeates our nature, then so does morality, and there is no escaping ethics, emotion and religion in our quest to understand who we are and how we got this way. 30

*Passage 2: Jesse Weinberg discusses the power of kindness*

- 1 Happiness researcher Sean Achor demonstrated through his extensive research that if you perform random acts of kindness for two minutes a day for twenty-one days, you can actually retrain your brain to be more positive. Studies such as his show that when your brain is more positive you are more likely to be creative, intelligent and productive. These attributes can spin into what we perceive as 'quality of life' attributes – job success, wealth, healthy relationships, and better health. This adage, that happiness breeds success, is counterintuitive to what Western society popularly perceives as the opposite, that success lends itself to happiness. 5
- 2 Kindness is a simple concept, yet so very impactful. It can make the world a better place by ending suffering at the hands of war, hunger, human rights violations, and injustice. It has the power to drastically improve our own well-being as well as that of our families, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. The very act of expressing graciousness to one another can make us more empathetic of other people's hardships. Within the workforce, kindness towards one another can inspire employees to be more productive and make businesses more profitable. And within our communities, kindness contributes to safer and cleaner schools and neighbourhoods. 10
- 3 Despite the dog-eat-dog world that we live in, unexpected kindness is the most powerful, least costly and most underrated agent in human change. It is also the easiest thing in the world to execute. With very little time (even just two minutes a day) and very minimal effort we can transform a human being's day, week, or even life. The return on investment is off the charts! How can something so simple and so easy have such a tremendous impact on others and ourselves? 15
- 4 To start a movement of kindness, Kindness & Co created Random Act of Kindness Kits. The kits empower an individual to start their own chain reaction of kindness. Each kit includes a long list of fun and innovative ways in which the recipient can create their own acts of kindness. They found that people increasingly value experiences over material things, Kindness Kits are their way of replacing consumerism in holiday or birthday gift-giving and replacing it with the truly honourable experience of spreading cheer in people's lives. Additionally, businesses and organisations are using Kindness Kits for employee gifts, thank you's, and tokens of customer or employee appreciation, to name a few. 20 25
- 5 While it seems inconceivable that benevolence has a place in today's cutthroat business environment, even the most successful companies are recognizing its virtues. Billionaire and entrepreneur Mark Cuban was recently quoted saying "Nice is way undervalued right now. It's one of the most valuable assets out there," when asked about negotiating tips. 30
- 6 Instead of buying bland, typical gifts again this year for your friends and family, and acquaintances, how about saying and doing something more imaginative and creative that will make a bigger difference to both you and them. Rather than giving your employees a logo-emblazoned corporate gift that lacks any real value to them, give them the experience of kindness. Give a positive experience that makes the recipient happy and be beneficial to the world. In the words of Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you did, they will forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel." 35
- 7 Every act of kindness creates a ripple effect that spreads with no end in sight. Let us run with it!