



Book Recommendation

The Way We Are by Hugh Mackay

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity to recommend Hugh Mackay's latest book, *The Way We Are*, which I alluded to when I wrote an earlier blog about his book, [The Inner Self](#). The subtitle of this book is *Lessons from a lifetime of listening*, and I for one are heartily grateful for these lessons.

Mackay, a much published and leading Australian sociologist, has the gravitas of a learned elder. His observations and reflections are of great relevance and value. The central theme of the book is: "Because we are born to co-operate, we are also born with the equipment we need to achieve social harmony — the capacity for kindness, compassion, tolerance and empathy. That cluster of traits, when nurtured, brings out the very best in us and, we now know, has actually contributed to the survival of the species." Mackay postulates: "it is our deepest vulnerabilities—being dependent on others. Feeling compassion and experiencing empathy—that could have given us the edge."

However, he also observes that we are in danger of losing that 'winning' factor with our erosion of the foundations of that connectedness. He writes: "when a herd animal is cut off from the herd—or even when it feels itself cut off, excluded, ignored, underappreciated—the consequences can be dire". The current consequence of this disconnection is loneliness. The lesson from Mackay is that the hope for our culture is, we must turn to each other and rebuild community. Returning to our core value of kindness would appear to be the key to our continued survival. This does not take a revolution. Maybe the way is gentler: "Perhaps there are ways we can modify our choices, moment by moment, by establishing habits of daily life that serve the goal of creating greater social harmony in the household we're part of, in the family we belong to, in the place where we work and, in the street, where we live." The good news, and for this I am grateful to Mackay, that there is good news, in a world where the 'news' each day is dominated by doom and gloom, is that these gentle ways are within all our reach.

Mackay's definition of kindness is also within reach: it is 'anything we do to show other people that we take them seriously.' And 'Nothing says, 'I take you seriously quite so eloquently, or as kindly, as attentive empathic listening'. He states the wonderful observation that we can attest to at **my manifesto**, "if you seek ways of helping to make the world a better place through the nature of your personal influence, then deep life-satisfaction awaits you.'

While Mackay's warning is evident, his hopefulness and the simplicity and accessibility of his ways to counter the trends of separateness are within the reach of all of us. As he so eloquently writes, "in the end, the sense of interdependence—our engagement with the shimmering, vibrating web of interconnectedness—must prevail because that's the only thing that will prevent us from descending into the chaos of anarchy." Indeed.