



The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society

Frans de Waal

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"An important and timely message about the biological roots of human kindness."

—Desmond Morris, author of *The Naked Ape*

Are we our brothers' keepers? Do we have an instinct for compassion? Or are we, as is often assumed, only on earth to serve our own survival and interests? In this thought-provoking book, the acclaimed author of *Our Inner Ape* examines how empathy comes naturally to a great variety of animals, including humans.

By studying social behaviors in animals, such as bonding, the herd instinct, the forming of trusting alliances, expressions of consolation, and conflict resolution, Frans de Waal demonstrates that animals—and humans—are "preprogrammed to reach out." He has found that chimpanzees care for mates that are wounded by leopards, elephants offer "reassuring rumbles" to youngsters in distress, and dolphins support sick companions near the water's surface to prevent them from drowning. From day one humans have innate sensitivities to faces, bodies, and voices; we've been designed to feel for one another.

De Waal's theory runs counter to the assumption that humans are inherently selfish, which can be seen in the fields of politics, law, and finance, and which seems to be evidenced by the current greed-driven stock market collapse. But he cites the public's outrage at the U.S. government's lack of empathy in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as a significant shift in perspective—one that helped Barack Obama become elected and ushered in what may well become an Age of Empathy. Through a better understanding of empathy's survival value in evolution, de Waal suggests, we can work together toward a more just society based on a more generous and accurate view of human nature.

Written in layman's prose with a wealth of anecdotes, wry humor, and incisive intelligence, *The Age of Empathy* is essential reading for our embattled times.

From the Hardcover edition.



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