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Review by Francine Prose

THE KINDNESS MANIFESTO

Why we need to care now

QUITE FRANKLY, I've never understood why it might be a bad idea to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and help the poor. But the next time I find myself in an argument with someone who believes that welfare and public education are ruining our society, and that universal health insurance will destroy our medical system, I will be very glad to have read (and to be able to quote) Deborah Stone's

The Samaritan's Dilemma (Perseus). Beginning with the disturbing

observation that most Americans' feelings about politics have become almost entirely divorced from their notions of kindness and obligation toward those in need, Stone's calm, logical, and immensely reassuring book dismantles the standard arguments against a more caring society ("Help makes people dependent") and persuades us that acts of charity and social responsibility actually make us stronger as individuals and better citizens of a democracy.

She looks at examples of "everyday

altruism"—from Meals on Wheels to family caregiving—and at the ways in which, over the last decades, our government has actively discouraged Americans from acting on their better impulses.

Finishing *The Samaritan's Dilemma*, you not only want to give the book to your neighbors and send it to your congressional representatives but may find yourself wishing that, when the time comes for our next president to assemble a cabinet, Deborah Stone could be appointed our first Secretary of Compassion. —F.P.

