**Resilience**The art of keeping going even when things are looking dark; of accepting reversals as normal, of refusing to frighten others with one’s own fears and of remembering that human nature is in the end reassuringly tough.

**Empathy**The capacity to connect imaginatively with the sufferings and unique experiences of another person. The courage to become someone else and look back at oneself with honesty.

**Patience**We lose our temper because we believe that things should be perfect. We’ve grown so good in some areas (putting men on the moon etc.), we’re ever less able to deal with things that still insist on going wrong; like traffic, government, other people… We should grow calmer and more forgiving by getting more realistic about how things actually tend to go.

**Sacrifice**We’re hardwired to seek our own advantage but also have a miraculous ability, very occasionally, to forego our own satisfactions in the name of someone or something else. We won’t ever manage to raise a family, love someone else or save the planet if we don’t keep up with the art of sacrifice.

**Politeness**Politeness has a bad name. We often assume it’s about being ‘fake’ (which is meant to be bad) as opposed to ‘really ourselves’ (which is meant to be good). However, given what we’re really like deep down, we should spare others too much exposure to our deeper selves. We need to learn ‘manners’, which aren’t evil – they are the necessary internal rules of civilisation. Politeness is very linked to tolerance, the capacity to live alongside people whom one will never agree with, but at the same time, can’t avoid.

**Humour**Seeing the funny sides of situations and of oneself doesn’t sound very serious, but it is integral to wisdom, because it’s a sign that one is able to put a benevolent finger on the gap between what we want to happen and what life can actually provide; what we dream of being and what we actually are, what we hope other people will be like and what they are actually like. Like anger, humour springs from disappointment, but it’s disappointment optimally channelled. It’s one of the best things we can do with our sadness.

**Self-Awareness**To know oneself is to try not to blame others for one’s troubles and moods; to have a sense of what’s going on inside oneself, and what actually belongs to the world.

**Forgiveness**Forgiveness means a long memory of all the times when we wouldn’t have got through life without someone cutting us some slack. It’s recognising that living with others isn’t possible without excusing errors.

**Hope**The way the world is now is only a pale shadow of what it could one day be. We’re still only at the beginning of history. As you get older, despair becomes far easier, almost reflex (whereas in adolescence, it was still cool and adventurous). Pessimism isn’t necessarily deep, nor optimism shallow.

**Confidence**The greatest projects and schemes die for no grander reasons than that we don’t dare. Confidence isn’t arrogance, it’s based on a constant awareness of how short life is and how little we ultimately lose from risking everything.

The exhortations we need about being kinder are typically not terribly complex. These are all things we know we ought to do but which we manage to forget at key moments. We are holding to an unhelpfully sophisticated view of ourselves if we think we are above hearing well-placed, blunt and simply structured reminders about goodness. There is greater wisdom in accepting that we are in most situations clunking and rather simple machines, with only a few moving parts and in want of much the same firm, basic guidance as is naturally offered to children and domestic animals.

A lack of absolute agreement on how to be good should not in itself be enough to disqualify us from investigating and promoting the notion of such a project. Ultimately, each one of us needs to formulate his or her own list of important virtues. Although the priority of moral instruction should be general, the list of virtues to guide us should be specific, given that we all incline in astonishingly personal ways to idiocy and craziness.