

Review of Hope for Humanity: How Understanding and Healing Trauma Could Solve the Planetary Crisis.

(2011) Malcolm Hollick and Christine Connelly. O- books. England.

Joan Wilmot¹

Hope for humanity: How understanding and healing trauma could solve the planetary crisis, by Malcolm Hollick and Christine Connelly, is an extremely helpful book in that it invites us to look at ours and others' behaviour from the perspective of trauma.

Early on they say, "Trauma warps our personality, blights our health, stunts our development, and condemns us to living well below our potential, both as individuals and as a species. Yet it is so widespread and embedded in our culture that we do not recognise it, and accept our traumatised way as being normal."

They further state, "We believe that our planetary crisis is the result of trauma." In the course of the book they look at the causes of trauma throughout history and also show how trauma is compounded and passed on by the lack of acknowledgement and recognition. They notice, in not recognising that often as human beings we are in a state of shock and trauma, we perpetuate trauma both on ourselves and on our own people as well as our enemies, generation after generation.

I very much agree with them both from my own personal life and in my work as a psychotherapist, supervisor (work mentor) and trainer. I have come to believe the unacknowledged shock in ourselves leads us in our day-to-day conversations and transactions to both shock ourselves and the people with whom we come into contact, and to being more vulnerable to being shocked by other people. I think these every day exchanges probably cause more traumas for most of us in a semi-conscious, unrecognised way and in the way they accumulate over time, than obviously traumatic events. This is probably because our collective understanding has moved on in the last hundred years of recognising the effect of large-scale disasters and the need to attend to people who have suffered them.

I invite you, as do Malcolm and Christine in their book, to consider trauma to be at the root of our disease. You might do this the next time you are in, or witness a conversation, in which people are raising their voices, or getting tense or are uncomfortable, to consider that there may

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be some element of shock or trauma in the mix, and that in holding that perspective it gives you better options for being present and dealing with it.

As a psychotherapist I have also found this to be true. When sometimes I have asked a client if they might have been in a state of shock when they have been struggling to come to terms with, understand, and move on with a distressing situation in their lives, it is as if a light bulb has gone on. I see their eyes clear, their breathing relax, they come out of the shock and back to themselves. I find then, as trauma therapist Peter Levine says in the prologue, “Not only can trauma be healed, it can be transformative.” Malcolm and Christine demonstrate how the recognition and understanding of trauma in our daily lives evokes compassion for us, our fellow human beings and our world, which then forms the ground for healing.

The book is divided into four parts and the following summary is taken from the beginning of their book. They start in Part I with a description of the nature, causes and impacts of trauma. This is followed in Part II by a discussion of the characteristics of the human brain and mind that distinguish us from other animals, and make us more vulnerable to trauma.

In Part III, they trace key aspects of the evolution of human culture from hunting and gathering to the establishment of agriculture. They present the theory that despite a potential for trauma, the evidence suggests that

we maintained a largely peaceful, cooperative and egalitarian “partnership” culture for tens of thousands of years and that it was not until about 6,000 years ago that human culture changed. At that time, the climate dried dramatically over a huge belt of latitudes stretching round the globe. In its wake came famine, conflict and trauma, followed by an equally dramatic cultural discontinuity that Steve Taylor called “The Fall.”

The events of *the fall* are described in Part IV, together with discussion of its causes and consequences, and reactions to it. Part V examines in detail the incidence of trauma in the world today, from before birth to adulthood, and from the individual to whole societies.

I found the first five sections of the book the most useful even though I had some reservations about the fall theory. The development of their thinking is thought provoking, clear, compassionate, and informative and expands our understanding of our human condition practically, psychologically and spiritually. It does this both in terms of our concerns for ourselves and our own health and healing and also from the wider perspective of our immediate family, our extended family, our tribe, and to the global perspective of our nation and the planet. The book moves the reader through what in therapeutic terms is known as the “drama triangle” (Karpman), that of experiencing the world from the perspective of the roles of “victim,” “persecutor,” and “rescuer.” This is a cycle that endlessly repeats itself. However, through the perspective of understanding and compassion it shows how we can move from the drama triangle to the beneficial triangle of *vulnerability*, *potency*, and *responsiveness*, which naturally leads to healing.

Finally, in Part VI they set out a strategy for changing the course of history from domination to partnership, and encouraging the “emergence of the possible human.” I personally found this part of the book the least useful, or perhaps a better term would be, least necessary. Once the

word “must” begins to appear regularly, as it did in this section, fear has probably re-emerged and with that, a contraction. It is not surprising given the subject matter of the book that the process would play out in the book in some ways and through the authors. They said as much themselves. As Malcolm and Christine reached the end of the book maybe the fear that its message would not impact the reader enough built up a rush for, and pressure for, strategies and solutions, which I found less informed and interesting than the rest of the book.

When a shift in consciousness or a different way of looking happens, which I think the book invites us into, the next steps naturally happen. You can trust the individual and the group and in this instance the book! Enjoy!