

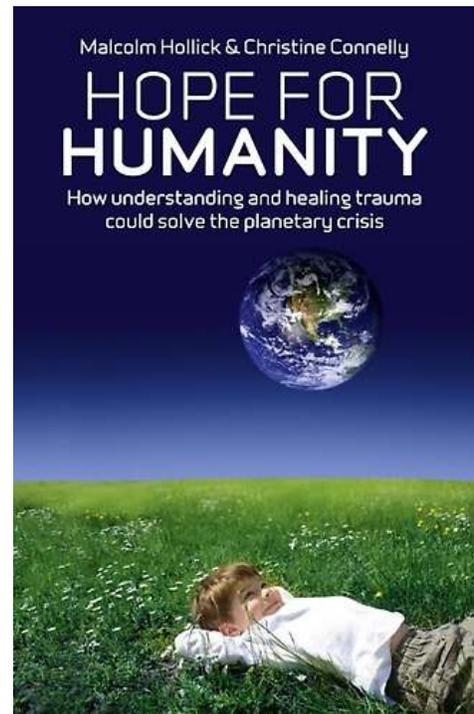
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## Hope for Humanity

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Hope for Humanity is an immensely detailed account which focuses on how trauma, both individually and collectively, affects the human psyche. The authors define trauma early on by stating that trauma is “an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking and which may result in lasting mental and physical effects” (p.2). Rightly so, the authors state that trauma is so widespread and embedded in our culture that many of us have accepted trauma as the norm. In documenting the role of trauma across thousands of years through prehistory, history and the present the authors report that the first human civilisations lived in the absence of trauma.

Indeed, the authors state that the evidence pertaining to these early civilisations suggests that they “...maintained [a] largely peaceful, cooperative and egalitarian partnership...” (p. 2). This continued until an era, which Steve Taylor called The Fall. The Fall was a major change in human culture which occurred during the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This era saw major climate changes and the emergence of dominator cultures which were characterised by warlike, aggressive, competitive and hierarchical traits. These traits combined with famine and poverty created multiple traumas. The authors then go on to discuss the two major reactions to the 'Fall'. First, approximately 2500 years ago there was a rise in major religions which aimed to ease human suffering. Then, only 250 years ago, there were movements to increase human rights and end slavery, to name a few. The authors propose that humans can survive the current crises by taking strong collective action, aiming for

higher levels of consciousness, and practicing universal compassion and love for all human beings. Thus, they suggest 'Hope for Humanity'.

Malcolm Hollick and Christine Connelly divide the book into six parts which conclude with a short epilogue. Part I titled 'Understanding Trauma' discusses the nature of trauma, its causes, how humans respond to trauma, the consequences of trauma, collective and generational trauma and how trauma can be healed. Throughout Part I the authors provide several useful lists detailing potential traumatic events and situations, strategies for coping with traumatic situations, and the symptoms and effects of trauma. The latter is the most notable. It details the symptoms and effects of trauma across developmental, psychological, emotional, behavioural and physical domains and thus illustrates the huge impact that the experience of trauma can have on individuals.

The closure to Part I ask the reader 14 pertinent questions in relation to trauma, for example "Why do humans suffer so much from trauma?" and "How can we minimise the creation of fresh trauma?" (p. 53). The authors state that these are the questions posed and considered in the remainder of the book. However, they clearly state that although they will attempt to cover these questions no-one can truly provide all the answers, yet it is still important that these questions are posed. This section really spurs the interest of the reader.

Part II titled 'The Human Brain and Mind' discusses the evolution of the human brain and mind and how such can be differentiated from those of other animals. The authors discuss how our brains have evolved to make us more vulnerable to trauma. Part III and IV, were titled 'From the Golden Age to Agricultural Civilisation' and 'The Fall' respectively. Part III discusses human civilisations from Hunter Gathers to Farmers. The authors conclude this section by stating that "As human culture evolved beyond hunting and gathering to farming and agricultural civilisation, so the pressure of change grew, and the potential for trauma increased" (p. 110). Part IV discusses the events of 'The Fall', its causes and consequences, and the two major reactions to the Fall. In the closure to the section the authors bring back the focus of the book by stating that there is still hope for humanity. They state that "Prehistory demonstrates clearly that humans are not innately violent, aggressive and selfish. We are not inevitably doomed by our genes to destroy ourselves. There is another side to our nature that is cooperative, peaceful, compassionate and generous; a side that we can foster and bring to the fore once again as we learn to heal our existing wounds and minimise the creation of fresh trauma" (p. 161).

Part V takes a detailed look at trauma today. It covers the incidence of trauma at both an individual and societal level spanning the full lifespan. This section of the book, in my opinion, is the jewel in the crown. It seeks to answer several key questions, which deserve to be highlighted in this review, as follows:

1. What is known about the biological mechanisms of trauma?
2. How and where are the memories of traumatic experiences stored?
3. How is trauma transmitted from one generation to the next?
4. How common is trauma today?
5. How does trauma affect the development of the individual?
6. How do the effects of trauma vary with age?
7. What impacts does trauma have on modern society?
8. How is trauma related to the problems we are facing as a civilisation and a species?

The authors provide a good introduction to the available material in an attempt to answer the above questions. Of particular note, the authors touch on a relatively new area of epigenetics which proposes that trauma or at least how we respond to trauma may be inherited. One complaint related to this section is that I was left wanting more detail. However, I was particularly interested in reading one of the following sections on trauma before and during birth. This particular section felt controversial but the authors presented the material well. To illustrate my point I refer you to the following quote "...it matters whether a baby is conceived in love, tenderness, and out of desire for a child, or in the violence, anger and hatred of a rape. It matters whether a baby is wanted by its mother, or the pregnancy is a disaster for her" (p. 182).

Other interesting sections, from a scholarly perspective, in this part of the book relate to those covering trauma in infancy, childhood and adolescence. I cannot say these were an enjoyable read; in fact the section, and detailed examples of particular events, on male circumcision and female genital mutilation practices inflicted on young children, was difficult to read. Thankfully, the authors point out that these practices have now been banned in many countries and thus are believed to be greatly reduced. However, they also note that unfortunately these practices have, not yet, been completely eradicated. Rightly so, the authors report that childhood maltreatment still occurs worldwide stating that it is imperative that governments employ relevant initiatives to decrease the incidence of childhood maltreatment.

Part IV titled 'Healing into Partnership' details multiple strategies for reducing potentially traumatic events and for developing resilience. Once again the authors provide detailed useful lists of such strategies, many of which are thought provoking. The latter sections of Part IV discuss healing trauma and working towards a partnership civilisation.

Overall, I found Hollick and Connelly's book *Hope for Humanity* to be a fascinating, comprehensive, and informative read. Although I had some reservations about certain sections of the book, such as the section on 'The Fall' and the section on the 'Evolution of the human brain and mind', I would recommend this book to others.