

Book Review: The Future of Humanity

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Abstract

If one is wondering how to *really* create change in the world, then *The Future of Humanity* (1986) is a great place to start. It showcases two dialogues between Indian educator and philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti and theoretical physicist David Bohm. In the review of this book, the author explores why this tiny, short book is so powerful, especially for those with questions and concerns about formal education systems as they exist today, and the future of the world itself.

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Book Review: The Future of Humanity

The book, *The Future of Humanity* (1986) contains two dialogues between Jiddu Krishnamurti, an Indian philosopher and educator who lived from 1895 to 1986, and David Bohm, a theoretical physicist with strong interests in quantum theory, neuropsychology and the philosophy of the mind who lived from 1917 to 1992. Both these men participated in a series of dialogues over several years. The conversations in *The Future of Humanity* happened in 1983 after they had had several other conversations represented in a book called, *The Ending of Time: Where Philosophy and Physics Meet* (1986). There are also videos and audio recordings of these conversations (2017/2018).

The Future of Humanity (1986) is significant for educators and parents interested in Unschooling and Alternative Learning because it is a great, short introduction to Krishnamurti's ideas that continue to challenge conventional education systems, how we (as adults and children) look at and 'see' the world, and the 'conditioning' we are exposed to through these systems. To address many of the critical issues we are faced with today, Krishnamurti and Bohm believed it was important to understand the context of our educational systems and how these systems continue to 'condition' the minds of children and youth today, but also how they have likely 'conditioned' our own minds and how that 'conditioning' then perpetuates a lack of awareness of ourselves in a way that inhibits our ability to solve many of the problems we are facing in society today.

Because *The Future of Humanity* (1986) is about a conversation from a later period in Krishnamurti and Bohm's relationship, some people might think it is for people who have already studied Krishnamurti and his ideas related to how he thought our minds, brains and consciousness work, and how this might be related to how we create change in the world. I would argue it's actually a very accessible book, and a great place to start considering many of

the challenges we're facing today including the pandemic of COVID-19, huge inequities in our economic and social systems, the historic and ongoing impact of racism, and the immensity of climate change that literally threatens to wipe out all life on earth.

In the Preface of the book, Bohm also says he thinks this book (also very little and short) is quite capable of standing on its own or being a great introduction to other conversations between himself and Krishnamurti captured in the book, *The Ending of Time: Where Philosophy and Physics Meet* (1986/2014). The newest edition of this book published in 2014 now also includes *The Future of Humanity* (1986).

The starting point for Bohm and Krishnamurti's conversations in *The Future of Humanity* (1986), says Bohm is one of the most vital questions we all could be asking: What is the future of humanity? Bohm says the dialogues in the book "constitute a serious inquiry" (p. 2) into this question and address "many of the basic points of Krishnamurti's teachings" (p. 2).

For people new to the ideas of Krishnamurti, many may ask: What are some of Krishnamurti's key teachings? One of the most central themes is that any real change starts with each one of us; our own understanding of how *consciousness* of the world works, and what difference it makes in where we focus our attention. Krishnamurti (1986) describes *consciousness as the me*; "my name, form, and all the experiences, remembrances, and so on that I have had. The whole structure of me is put together by thought" (p. 10). This is a very important idea, what is consciousness, that Krishnamurti and Bohm explore in depth. Krishnamurti (1986) describes consciousness as being very limited because it is informed by *thought*.

Consciousness is made up of all that we have remembered: beliefs, dogma's, rituals, fears, pleasures, sorrow.... Thought has put all this together, which is my

consciousness - the reactions, the responses, the memories... all that makes up consciousness. (p. 12)

Krishnamurti (1986) also says *thought* is limited because it is informed also by *knowledge*, which is also limited. Bohm (1986) also acknowledges this as well.

JK: ...There is always more and more unknown. So, once we admit that knowledge is limited, then thought is limited.

DB: Yes, thought depends on knowledge, and the knowledge does not cover everything. Therefore thought will not be able to handle everything that happens.

JK: That's right. But that is what the politicians and all the other people are doing. They think they can solve every problem [with thought and knowledge].

DB: Yes. You can see in the case of politicians that knowledge is very limited, in fact it is almost nonexistent! And, therefore, when you lack adequate knowledge of what you are dealing with, you create more confusion.

JK: Yes. So then as thought is limited, our consciousness, which has been put together by thought, is limited (pp.14-15).

This conversation about the limitations of knowledge, our thoughts and in turn our consciousness applies even to science and the creation of knowledge in this area. Krishnamurti (1986) responds to Bohm on this topic saying: "That is what I am saying. The unknown, the limitless, cannot be captured by thought" (p. 15).

For Krishnamurti, consciousness and *awareness* are not synonymous in his work. For him, it is critical where and how we focus our *attention* because this is what leads to a clarity of understanding that can manifest as *insights* that can generate tremendous passion and energy for action. This can only happen, says Krishnamurti, when we *make space* for inquiry to happen, and understand how various emotions and conditioning influences can inhibit this process. In

addition, Bohm (1986) says Krishnamurti also believed that it is possible to change conditioning of the brain, even “change the cells of the brain and remove [any] destructive conditioning” (p. 3). Bohm adds that if this is so, “then it is crucially important that there be this kind of attention, and that we give to this question the same intensity of energy that we generally give to other activities of life that are really of vital interest to us” (p. 3).

As Krishnamurti and Bohm begin their dialogues, the interplay between the two is comfortable and one of great camaraderie. It is as if the dialogue of the two of them together is one of mutual inquiry like pulling back the many layers of an onion, but it also seems as if Bohm is working to help set the stage for Krishnamurti to speak to many of his ideas related to the future of humanity. As we begin this journey with Krishnamurti and Bohm in this book, they start with the question of what it means to *make a living* and agree this is a problem many young people are facing.

Quickly the two go on though to explore one of the key principles of Krishnamurti’s ideas, the question of time and *becoming*. Krishnamurti (1986) asks: “Why are we concerned about the future? The future is now” (p. 6). This statement is critical in Krishnamurti’s ideas because he does not believe in *the future* as a concept that we should dwell on. For him, deep understanding of a problem which results in a clear *insight* should lead to a burst of energy that then compels us to act immediately in the present, the *now* to create change. If we all behaved this way, then change would be much easier. The challenge for us according to Krishnamurti is *unlearning* all the conditioning *we’ve* been exposed to, all the formal *knowledge* that has been crammed into our brains, and making space and quiet to really *listen* and *see* with a much higher quality of attentiveness to what our *mind* is telling us, based on our own senses, is *reality*. This is where ideas related to critical pedagogy and educator Paulo Freire would seem to connect with Krishnamurti’s ideas, but also go further. What exactly are our *education* systems designed to

do? Are our systems supporting the development of a natural *intelligence* that we all share, or are they designed to just cram more and more *knowledge* into our heads similar to the way Freire refers to and criticizes the *banking* of education. In these times where change is happening at a pace we have never seen before, and the threats we are facing are literally existential, what do we really need to be focusing on for ourselves, our youth and our children?

The ultimate question Krishnamurti and Bohm are exploring in *The Future of Humanity* (1986) is can suffering end? I'm sure if they were alive today, they would also be challenging us to address the state of the planet and climate change too. As part of their discussion on suffering, they go on to talk about whether 'thought,' good intentions or 'knowledge' can solve the problem of suffering. They both acknowledge what we're doing is not working because the problem is still a problem despite various efforts over time to address this. Krishnamurti (1986) goes on to say: "Man has always been in trouble, in turmoil, in fear. And facing all the confusion of the world, can there be a solution to this?" (p.85) He adds:

What is this new instrument that will put an end to all this misery?... there is a new instrument which is the mind, which is intelligence. But the difficulty is also that people won't listen to all this. Both the scientists and the ordinary laymen like us have come to some definite conclusions, and they won't listen.
(p. 86)

For Krishnamurti (1986), the *mind* is different from *thought* and the *brain*. He says we can only come into contact with the mind where *intelligence* lives when "the self is not" (p. 88). Krishnamurti adds: "To put it very simply, when the self is not, there is beauty, silence, space; then that intelligence which is born of compassion, operates through the brain" (p. 88).

Bohm (1986) agrees and then goes on to ask: "Do you think it is possible that a certain number of brains coming into contact with the mind in this way will be able to have an effect on

mankind...beyond just the immediate, obvious effect of communication?" (p. 86). Krishnamurti says yes, but wonders how one can "convey this subject to a person who is steeped in tradition, who is conditioned, and won't even take time to consider, to listen?" (p. 86). Bohm wonders if there is some *permeability* to the various forms of conditioning that hold us back from seeing our world and the impact of our own *thoughts* and actions more clearly. He goes on to ask whether "some aspect of meditation... can be helpful when the self is acting?" (p. 88).

At this point, Bohm and Krishnamurti (1986) begin a discussion of another of Krishnamurti's key ideas and questions: "Is the Observer different than the Observed?" (p. 89). This is very near the end of the book, but includes a discussion of one of the most important principles of Krishnamurti's ideas; that there is no division between the thinker and the thought. He reiterates ideas mentioned earlier about the *self* and says: "You are your name. You are your form, your body. You are the reactions and actions. You are the belief, the fear, the suffering and pleasure. You are all that" (p. 89). Bohm responds by asking: So, if I watch anger for a while, I can see that I am very biased by the anger, so at some stage I say that I am one with that anger?" (p. 90). Krishnamurti responds saying: "No, not 'I am one with it;' I am it" (p. 90).

This leads to the end of the book where Krishnamurti and Bohm discuss the implications of this idea as it might relate to action and change, not in the future but in the present. Krishnamurti (1986) notes: "energy means attention" (p. 92). Bohm asks then how one can start to enhance this process of *attention* that can then translate into *energy*. Krishnamurti says: "...start simply. Start with 'what is,' what I am. Self knowledge is so important. It is not an accumulated process of knowledge, which one then looks at; it is constant learning about oneself" (p. 92).

This is one of the most important *insights* of this book. We know from many schools of leadership that self-knowledge is critical. However, Krishnamurti and Bohm's conversation in

The Future of Humanity is talking about a depth of inquiry related to one's awareness, one's own emotions, consciousness, self and the world that goes well beyond anything we have generally heard of before. Again, this is not the focus of our current education systems that continue to be steeped in a philosophy of neo-liberalism based on *workforce attachment* and *skill development* to ensure we are able to contribute to the development of *the economy* in a way that leaves no time for the kind of *space* that Krishnamurti says we need to be able to *see* our world in such a way that the changes needed are so clear we could do nothing else but *be* differently in the world, and in doing so create the kind of change that is really needed.

Krishnamurti (1986) adds on the final page: "...to know and to comprehend oneself. To understand oneself is such a subtle, complex thing. It is living" (p.93). Bohm (1986) agrees noting the work to be done seems to be: "Essentially knowing yourself in the very moment when things are happening" (p. 93). For Krishnamurti and Bohm, creating the *future* of humanity (or the *present* as Krishnamurti would likely point out) begins with ourselves, and the process of increasing our awareness of ourselves. Understanding more clearly what drives us to *think* and *behave* in various ways is the starting point for all of the various systems, structures, problems and solutions we have created, and what we need to create change.

While many of the ideas expressed and explored in *The Future of Humanity* (1986) require some extensive reflection, pondering, and stretching as one reads this book, the depth and quality of the process of inquiry between Bohm and Krishnamurti is inspiring. It is a valuable *bird's eye* view of how to engage with what Bohm and Krishnamurti are encouraging us to do which is to slow down, make space in our brains and minds to really listen and inquire together about who we are, what the real causes of suffering in the world are, our roles in creating that suffering, our roles in creating *systems* (including those related to education) that actually

perpetuate ignorance of how each of us is intrinsically connected to the world as it exists, and how we could *be* different, act differently to create the change we say we want.

As we not only look forward to what the future of humanity could be, this book also inspires us not to wait for some moment in the future to figure things out. It inspires us to reach out and start to inquire together, now, how things could be different. It also speaks to the inherent intelligence and ability we all have as human beings to do this work. No one person has access to the knowledge we need to be able to do this work. We all have the power of our own minds, and that of a collective mindset that could enable the future of humanity, and how we are in this world, to start now. To do this though, we also need to start with unschooling ourselves, and meditating and inquiring much more deeply together on what kind of educational systems we really want and need for our children and youth that will enable them to create a future beyond what even we can imagine; a world with compassion and love, without the kind of division, judgement, fear and misery we know exists now.

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