

“ Love is not just a thing, a passive attitude; it is an active, energetic force ”

## Enhancing love

In this collection of articles I have invited contributions from a range of specialists on the nature of love. Even though their approaches are diverse, they all have something in common. They all understand that to enhance love requires discipline. It's not possible to enhance love or teach how to love with a woo woo attitude. In their individual ways, all the writers in this collection have applied incredible discipline; they embrace spiritual practice, scientific methodology, phenomenological inquiry, intense study, routine evaluation of outcomes and much more. Their discipline has created the conditions for their knowledge to emerge and earned them their authority on love. It's partly due to their discipline that they are now able to share their knowledge with us.

From the energetic, lusty, zesty dimension of *eros*, through the loyal, sturdy affectionate dimension of *philia* to the tender, embracing, boundless dimension of *agape*, we cover a lot of ground in this small collection of articles. The disciplines included are: social anthropology, Dr Helen Fisher; neurobiology, Dr Dan Siegel; clinical counselling, Dr Harville Hendrix; psychoanalysis, David Mann; social psychology, Professor C Hendrick; counselling psychology, Professor S Hendrick; embodied practice, Kai Ehrhardt; systemic constellations, Judith Hemming; and psychotherapy theory, Dr Geoff Warburton.

Weaving throughout these disciplines are the discourses of philosophy, neuroscience, spirituality and common sense. Consider this collection as a tasting menu, designed to whet your appetite for love. [P](#)

## References

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# Constellations and love

Constellation work, asserts Judith Hemming, enables clients to connect with the flow of love, helping them find respect for themselves and others

*Love is at work behind all human behaviour and, however strange it seems, behind all our psychological symptoms. That means in therapy it is essential to find the crucial point where the client's love is anchored. Then you have found the root of the problem and the start of the path that leads to resolution. Resolution also always has to do with love.*

*Love's hidden symmetry*  
(Bert Hellinger, 1998)

**H**ere are two examples of highly abbreviated stories in which, through a single constellation, a client was able to reorient themselves towards life and the capacity to love.

## The stories

John reports that he cannot sustain any close connection with a partner. He longs to have a family. His constellation reveals an overwhelmingly powerful connection

to his brother who was injured by birth complications and suffers from multiple disabilities. It becomes clear that he has unconsciously wanted to share (and therefore alleviate) his brother's fate. In a constellation, John discovers that his brother does not benefit from this self-imposed deprivation, and so instead he promises his brother he will always be there for him as he now moves on. Within a few months he has found a deeply satisfying partnership.

Sara, an anorectic woman whose ancestral line had been decimated by the Holocaust, wants to regain weight and leave behind her preoccupation with the unbearable suffering and loneliness of her parents. In her constellation, she meets representatives of her inner way of experiencing her murdered grandparents and asks for their blessing to thrive. The grandparents had indeed starved for years and it became clear to her that she was wishing to share their fate and represent it, since it was not something anyone in her family could bear to talk about. She relaxes and her heart opens as she sees that, deep within her, both the victims and their perpetrators are now dead and wish her well. This experience helps her to turn her gaze towards her own future, now willing to receive help in getting healthy.

## An applied philosophy

Bert Hellinger's books have sold an astonishing number of copies worldwide. Internationally, there are several thousand professional constellation practitioners. They have created international associations, journals, congresses, and supported the movement of the practice into many other fields beyond the psychotherapeutic. All this has grown out of the original work of Hellinger, a German ex-priest who worked in Africa and then trained in a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches. The practice of constellations



**Judith Hemming**

Judith, a UKCP member, is the founder of Moving Constellations and a former director of the Nowhere Foundation. In 1991, she trained in constellations work from its founder, Bert Hellinger, among others, and is now a leading figure in this world community of practitioners and teachers. Her previous experience as an English teacher and lecturer in education studies at the Institute of Education allowed her to pioneer this educational work.

has continued to grow and develop in the two or three decades since it was first demonstrated. Hellinger himself always saw his work more as a kind of applied philosophy – the development of a systemic, rather than an individual, lens through which to see the world, at variance with that of traditional individual therapy, as well as having a different focus and intention – which one might call ‘seeing and agreeing to life as it is’. It has become a diverse approach, practised by many kinds of professionals and not yet constrained in its development by regulatory restriction.

By arresting the familiar flow of discourse – interpretations and narratives – constellations shift the therapeutic process away from exploring emotional content *per se* towards the release of hidden impulses and loyalties within which such content is unconsciously embedded. In seeing current problems as located in the wider frame of space and time, it connects with its many different roots: shamanism, Zulu traditions and other western sources, especially the work of Satir, Moreno, Boszormeni-Nagy, the primal therapy of Janov, and Berne’s notions of scripts. Hellinger was powerfully influenced by his wartime experiences in Germany and his decades as a Catholic priest. However, constellations now exist independently of the man who originally brought them to prominence and are shedding some of Hellinger’s unconscious assumptions and provocative energy. To summarise, the work offers a group setting in which constellators help clients retrieve aspects of the whole setting of their situations that have been lost to view, bringing the living and the dead into mutually satisfactory and respectful order in the service of the living.

## Brief therapy

Constellations are now well established as a popular form of brief therapy. Countless clients report a sense of lasting healing and resolution after having only experienced one or two constellations that address their particular malaise or question. But they are indeed difficult to explain or understand. They are not supported by randomised controlled studies. Practitioners break many hallowed guidelines on what a therapeutic relationship should be. The presenting issue is often contextualised as an echo of long past events, pointing up

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transgenerational collective and systemic entanglements.

All this raises scepticism, understandably. It seems to make claims beyond the empirically supported therapies – cognitive, behavioural or interpersonal.

Writing about the practice of systemic constellations is therefore a daunting challenge, precisely because it diverges so far from accepted mainstream practice. Brevity in describing the approach is also likely to create misunderstanding. Constellations challenges us at every turn as we look at the process involved, the philosophy that underpins it, and even the resolutions that present themselves. The unusual assumptions are more familiar to philosophers, evolutionary biologists, epigeneticists, quantum scientists and spiritual practitioners than they are to psychotherapists. They rest on a view of a unified field, alive and intelligent, subject to laws (or at least deep habits) that curtail both individual choice and freedom.

## A helpful bridge to the systemic perspective

I have been drawn to the philosophy and practice of constellations since I first met it 20 years ago. My practice as a gestalt therapist and trainer provided me with a helpful bridge into the systemic perspective, with its emphasis on the unified field, the value of experiment and existential encounter, the practice of phenomenology and the power of dialogue. Still, the early constellations I witnessed back then were challenging. It has taken me much dedication to the practice before I have been able to understand the depths of what resources and supports a process, which has a lot to do with love – both its most intimate aspects and its most encompassing and impersonal.

Love is seen as the deepest sustainable

motivational lever – that which enables people to find the courage to act in the service of a happier life. Other sources of energy tend to be based on will and create resistance. But when a client sees that behaviour – theirs and others’ – has been motivated by love, however immature or unrealistic, they may be more able to agree to new perspectives.

We know how important it is for a child to be attuned to, to be loved. But infants are also active in their own love impulses. From birth, they naturally wish to support and belong with their parents and to play their part in maintaining the wholeness of the systems to which they owe their survival. This love is revealed in their unconscious loyalties in which they adhere to what is right according to the family values and predicaments they are born into, and feel guilty about if they deviate. Constellations reveal how children put themselves into service for their family, in the face of those tensions, living out such (inappropriate or impossible) sentences as ‘let me share your fate, let me carry it, let me put it right, let me go so you can stay and let me atone’. Such attitudes negatively influence the child’s capacity to make good use of the life they have been given.

## Sharing a fellowship of fate

Constellations work is based on the notion that humans inevitably belong to and want to share in their own particular family’s fellowship of fate, especially when there have been members who have been dismissed, forgotten or excluded. The work recognises that humans are fundamentally herd animals, where the survival of the herd or group has always needed to take precedence over the individual or current morality.

Love can be damaged in different ways. We are all familiar with the impact of trauma, bonding disruptions and existential loss, but less familiar perhaps with the impact of those factors as they have affected earlier or forgotten family members, constraining children to represent fates that truly do not belong to them or their life circumstances. Constellation work offers a specific set of practices to enable clients to re-establish their attachments afresh and become part of the flow of giving and receiving love and life, re-opening hearts that have long been closed and helping clients find respect for

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themselves and those with whom they have experienced painful disruptions. They often leave people feeling peace and gratitude and a sense of their right place in life. Such feelings seem to make love easier and to make conventional therapy more useful.

As has been known since the Greeks first categorised the four kinds of love (*eros, agape, philia* and *storge*), love is not a single unchanging kind of energy. Love evolves. If we are fortunate, it can mature from the blind love of the child to the thrill of personal erotic love to the more inclusive and respectful love that serves family and community life and, for some, to the kind of more impersonal or spiritual love that empowers the wise. All aspects of love (or blockages to love) tend to co-exist and are affected by what has gone before. Love begins as a merging urgency. It tolerates no difference: as it matures, it can eventually agree to things exactly as they are. Any psychotherapeutic approach needs to be able to help clients navigate and evolve these complex developments.

### Constellations asks a lot of its practitioners

It must by now be apparent that the philosophy underpinning the practice of constellations is complex and takes many different kinds of knowledge and skill, not all psychotherapeutic. Resting on these unusual assumptions, it asks a lot of its practitioners. It is always difficult for new ways of seeing the world – the creation of a new gestalt – to gain acceptance. Therapists belong to traditions that tend to evolve slowly, whereas big leaps of worldview are hard to assimilate. Constellations involves several leaps. They rest in part on the strange phenomenon of representative perception, where clients can witness living tableaux of their situation playing out, helping them see the world beyond their own particular and limited viewpoint. Any group member can stand in to represent an element

in someone else's life and find him or herself able to experience what uncannily and accurately feels like someone else's experience. As the constellation evolves, so do the perceptions of the representatives. This all occurs within what has been called a knowing field, alive and intelligent. It is difficult for anyone to take this on trust but all experience it when they participate in a constellation.

A constellation can represent complex systemic ingredients and explore their varying impacts. The relevant context stretches both vertically – from the past that is several generations back to the as yet unborn future – and horizontally too, encompassing many factors including culture, race and tribe, economic and social constraints, gender and so on. Clients naturally want to focus on their familiar points of view but when the bigger picture is illuminated it turns out there are many more respectful narratives that might help the person feel differently about their situation. This kind of shift is often valuable for people whose energy has flagged in trying to heal at an individual level. Systems seem to have a kind of independent and lawful (or at least habitual) validity with a clarity that shows up in a constellation as to who belongs and what belonging costs. Love can reignite and flourish when we follow these natural constraints that relate to time and space, the need for inclusion and respect; it is damaged when these are overridden.

### Drawing a line

The work then has to do with helping people find an appropriate place in relation to their family members and history. Often this means that clients' longing to play a

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part in healing the past is relinquished. Through loving respect, a line can be drawn between the issues that have entangled the family, opening new opportunities for the client to live well and wisely in the present.

The stance of the practitioner is also loving, but in a special way – on everyone's side, friendly but separate enough to be able to stand outside the invitations of transference, fearless in describing what is seen and moving the discourse into the clearest primary emotional truths. The constellation moves collectively, fed by the perception and experiences of all the participants and always towards dialogue with the original elements and family members. The therapist respects this love and works to help it achieve its goals in a better way. For example: 'I will go instead of you dear mother or father' becomes 'Even if you go I will stay. Please bless me if I stay'. Or: 'Better me than you. I will follow you – into your illness or death' becomes 'I respect your suffering and leave it in your hands. I will make something good from my life so that what you have given me is not wasted'.

*The basic therapeutic method is healing through love. When you contact love you are ready for the next step.*

*Love's own truths*

(Bert Hellinger, 2001) **P**

## Guest editors needed

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