Virtual Organizations in a Dynamic Context

THE WORLD UNTIL YESTERDAY

Jared Diamond

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Introduction – The World Until Yesterday

The author, Jared Diamond, starts the book with a prologue about an airport scene. He starts by sketching an airport, how the airport looks (lines, x-ray machines etc.), what items are there to see (Wall clocks, baggage belts etc.) and what type of people there are (pilot, stewards, cops, tourists etc..). The main idea behind this is: we take it all for granted. Distinctions with other airports are that most people are from New Guinea, and the national flag is different. He then start discussing the fact that New Guinea changed a lot, since it was founded by the Australians in 1931. Where other countries had thousands of years before changing in the current culture, in New Guinea it only took 75 years. In 1931 everyone would still attack one another that is unfamiliar, while in the current society that is no longer even a thought. The western culture affected the society in New Guinea a lot.

The study of the traditional society is because it is interesting to see how traditional lifestyles has shaped us to what we are. And how we take for granted that our basic needs are provided and can be bought in local supermarkets. The book is written to provide a research on how different traditional societies are, and how they affect us. “We shall see that some of those solutions provided by the traditional society may strike us, as superior to normal practices in the first world.” Although some thing are very positive in the traditional societies, other considers ourselves blessed to have discarded (such as infanticide, abandoning or killing elderly people). “Traditional societies may not only suggest to us some better living practices, but may also help us appreciate some advantages of our own society that we take for granted.”

Every state or country has to have bureaucracy and a leader to run the state and give the guidelines. It is to idealistic to think everybody has all the choices for himself. Because of the different cultures it is just not possible. Food production is the starting point of states.

The different traditional societies

The smallest and simplest type of society consist of just a few dozen individual (termed as band). In the band, everybody knows one another, group decisions can be reached by face-to-face discussion and there is no formal political leadership or strong economic specialization.

Bands grade into the next larger and more complex type of society (termed as tribe), consisting of a local group of hundreds of individuals. It is still possible that everybody knows everyone by name. There is a weak political leadership, a weak economic specialization and a lack of bureaucrats.

Tribes grade into the next stage of organizational complexity, called a chiefdom, containing thousands of subjects. They have shared ideologies and political and religious identities, often derived from the divine status of the chief. There is a recognized leader who makes decisions, it possesses recognized authority and claims a monopoly on the right to use force against his society members to ensure strangers inside the same chiefdom don’t fight each other. There are all-purpose officials whom collect tribute and settle disputes. Ranks are visible in the organization.

From chieftoms, states emerged by conquest or amalgamation under pressure, resulting in larger populations (often ethnically diverse). More layers of bureaucrats, standing armies, greater economic specialization, urbanization are active, that produce the type of societies that are blanked of the modern world.

“most causes and effects really consist of chains of causes, some more proximate and others more ultimate.”

Topics

Topics in the book are about: dangers and child-rearing (individuals), Treatment of elderly, languages, and health-promoting lifestyles, peaceful dispute resolution, religion, warfare, human social studies (art, cognition, behavior, cuisine, dance etc.). Mostly the subjects are discussed focusing on small-scale traditional societies. “At minimum, I hope that you will come to share my fascination with the different ways in which other peoples have organized their lives. Beyond that fascination, you may decide that some of what works so well for them could also work well for you as an individual, and for us as a society.”
Part One – Setting the Stage by Dividing Space

**Friends, Enemies, Strangers, and Traders**

The friction between different traditional societies start with the land partition. These partitions force the different societies to respect each other’s wishes in order not to start a war. Although sometimes the different societies agree on things, there is also disagreement about other things which may flare into violence.

Extreme mutually exclusive defended territories arises under a combination of four conditions:

1. Defended territories require a population sufficiently large and dense that people can be spared to devote time specifically to patrolling boundaries.
2. Exclusive territories require a productive, stable, predictable environment.
3. The territory must contain some valuable fixed resources or capital improvements worth defending.
4. Group membership must be rather constant, neighboring groups must be largely distinct, with little migration between groups.

There are also conditions of the less or no exclusivity, which are:

1. Sparse and small population, which make it impossible to patrol.
2. Unproductive, marginal, variable environments, with sparse unpredictable resources.
3. It doesn’t pay the risk to die for the territory.
4. Group memberships are fluid, visiting or transferring to other groups are not a problem.

In traditional societies, the terms friends, enemies and strangers have whole other meanings then in the modern societies. In traditional society a “Friend” is: a member of your own band or village, and those of neighboring bands and villages with which your band happens to be on peaceful terms. “Enemies” are member of neighboring bands and villages, with whom your band is on hostile terms with. And “Strangers” are unknown individual belonging to distant bands, with which your band has little or no contact.

In these traditional societies, just friendship is not a reason to visit someone, without a purpose a friendship doesn’t mean a lot. Diamond describes that because of the large societies in modern worlds, friendship is based on mutual interests and if you like one another. Traditional societies, which are mostly bands or tribes, do not have that type of friendship.

In the small-scale societies, the knowledge of the beyond the first or second neighbors was non-existent. These traditional limitations on knowledge of the world were ended when the European colonialists, explorers and traders proved the existence of a previously unknown outside world.

Trading is just one of the means of exchanging items which are either necessary (food and tools) or a luxury (shells, rings etc.). Trading in traditional society doesn’t always immediately exchange items, but can also be that you give someone something and hope that one day you’ll receive something back. Although in the modern world it seems very different (stores, salesman etc.) we still exchange items, only we now exchange money for an item.

Diamond concludes the part that traditional societies of the past, and those that survived into modern times, behaved like tiny nations. The maintained their own territories or core areas, visited and received visitors, and in some cases delineated, defended, and patrolled boundaries as rigorously as modern nations.
Part Two – Peace and War

Compensation for the Death of a Child

Diamond starts with a story about a boy who gets hit by a car in New Guinea. The accident is actually blamed on the kid, who did not check the street before crossing it. However, the company where the driver worked paid for compensation of the boy’s death to his family. The money is not to pay off for anything, but is used as a means of telling the family that their loss is greater than what can be paid in money. The New Guinea citizens deal with this situation for the reason that there will be no further dispute, it’s take care of in a rapid sense and to restore previous relationships.

This sounds appealing to us, “until we reflect how fundamentally it differs from the aims of our state system of justice.”

In the New Guinea environment people always know each other. Distances they travel are shorter, so you know the people in your town and probably those in the next town as well. And if you don’t know that person in the neighbor village, your family or friends do. That’s why restoring previous relationships is this important. For us, people who cross the lines of the law get punished by our government because they have the monopoly on violence and the justice system and we will likely never see that person again, so the need for relationship restoration is low. We have the believe that our government is, at least theoretically, impartial and thus take care of wrongdoers. We do not need to be scared that we or our property get damaged.

Besides getting even, states also deals with criminals who cross state laws. They need to show what is and what is not acceptable to individuals. In non-state environments citizens are closer to each other. Therefore, they are more likely to get to an understanding without crossing the lines of public or private law.

Both state laws and non-state laws have advantages. We have the advantage that we have a neutral government which disables members of other groups to take matters in their own hands and to prevent further violence.

About a Tiny War, About Many Wars

Chapter three and four describe several wars. Several situations where reasoning, payment and symbolism did not succeed to restore previous relationship. Diamond asks the question of what the main reason is that starts a war. To answer that question he first defines war as “War is recurrent violence between groups belonging to rival political units, and sanctioned by the units.”

How wars are being fought is quite difficult to describe, because observers influence the war. Would parties do anything differently if observers were not present at the battlefield? Researchers have looked at archeological evidence to remove this influence. This approach however deals with uncertainty because they only received indirect information of what happened. Through stories, paintings or bodies and material. It’s even harder to gather data from state wars, because there have only been a few wars and wars in non-state societies are quite common.

Even though data is scares and might be uncertain, Diamond claims to know what the ultimate reason for wars is for state wars it is to safely guard the citizens and area from leaders who are a danger to neighbors of that state. In non-state wars, it is usually because a group is growing too big and it needs extra land and resources. This enables them to protect themselves against uncertain happenings, like natural disasters or other wars. This is also one of the biggest reasons that states actually exist. They bring peace. Citizens can easily live their life knowing their government will secure their safety. It would be a lot more stressful to do anything if there were no rules or enforcement. Government also makes sure the victim does not take revenge on the criminal who crossed the line. It does so for us, in a sense.
Part Three – Young and Old

Chapter five describes various aspects of child rearing. Each paragraph describes a child rearing aspect and threads into detail on these aspects. These aspects, in turn, are compared on how it is handled in western culture now-a-days and how it is/was handled by traditional hunter-gatherer, farmer, and herder societies?. Such as the !Kung of southern African deserts, the Hadza of East Africa, the Ache Indians of Paraguay, and the Agta of the Philippines. As quoted by Diamond, in answering the question of why this is interesting, he stated the following: "One answer is an academic one: children account for up to half of a society's population. A sociologist who ignored half of a society’s members couldn’t claim to understand that society. Another academic answer is that every feature of adult life has a developmental component. One can’t understand a society’s practices of dispute resolution and marriage without knowing how children become socialized into those practices."

The chapter starts with a comparison of various child-rearing methods. Diamonds provides an example of a man called Enu, who's life story showed two extreme opposites. He first grew up in an environment where child-rearing was extremely strict and where children heavily burdened by feelings of guilt and obligations. This forced Enu to leave his family and to seek refuge in another village. By doing so, Enu encountered yet another extreme; a society which practices laissez-faire child-rearing methods. This means that children are free to do how they are pleased. Adults should not interfere with this process, a child will learn by mistakes, therefore children growing up in this society have various cuts, bruises and burn-scars. Although these methods would both be rejected in modern western societies, these are good examples of a -as claimed by Diamond- field of interest that has not been receiving enough research.

Childbirth and Infanticide are two aspects of which modern westerners might think to be something that will either happen in a hospital, or at least under the care of professional doctors. Infanticide is something that is not-done in modern western societies, to put it even more into perspective; infanticide is illegal in most societies. Although a modern westerner might this that these aspects are self-explanatory, one might be surprised to discover that in various traditional societies something 'self-explanatory' might be entirely different. For example childbirth can happen somewhere out in the wild and unassisted (The Piraha Indians of Brazil), childbirth might happen with a whole tribe watching and assisting (Agta people of the Philippines) or infanticide might even be a common thing to do (Ache Indians and the !Kung).

With Infanticide and the weaning and birth interval, however, more factors might should be considered than modern westerners might think. For example the reason to kill an infant might be for a greater 'good'. It might cripple the wellbeing of the whole tribe, or it can be certain that having two children might result in the death of at least one, or either, children due to a lack of food.

Also the nursing, the infant-adult contact and the fathers and allo-parents are different in traditional hunter-gatherer societies. In various hunter-gatherer societies it has been seen that children are in non-stop contact with their mothers, by whom the children are nursed on-demand. Eating, sleeping and living in the direct vicinity of a mother is a common practice amongst many tribes. There are some exception, when an infant has to be away from its mother, in these cases there most often is an allo-parent available to nurse the baby. Fathers seem to have a less prominent role in traditional hunter-gatherer society. This is due to the fact that fathers should hunt for food in order to keep the tribe alive. However, once a baby (boy) infant is old enough, he is adopted amongst the man of the tribe. The boy will learn its responsibilities and will leave his mother to the nursing of other children and cooking.

Responses to crying infants and physical punishment are some aspects that already differ much amongst modern western societies. There have been many debates about how to handle crying children and if physical punishment is allowed. For example, 50 years ago Germans tended to think of crying something that is 'unnecessary' and merely done for attention (hence; crying is done without reason). Pygmy societies for example, tend to respond immediately to a crying infant, even though American and British a few years back would still be afraid that a child will be spoiled by doing so, western societies tend to follow the trend of attending to their children quickly nowadays. Physical punishment; such as spanking and scolding differs from country to country.
Even within modern Europe physical punishment differs per country. Sweden for example prohibits physical punishment, a Swedish parent who spanks a child can be charged with the criminal offense of child abuse. Whilst in other countries, some because of religious reasons, tend to physically punish children.

Child autonomy, multi-age playgroups and child play & education are the last subjects mentioned by Diamond. One of the questions mentioned here is: "how much freedom or encouragement do children have to explore their environment?" As mentioned before, in societies who adopt laissez-faire child-rearing methods. Children learn from their mistakes in these societies, in other societies however, children might be raised extremely protective. This (over) protection might lead to separation of children by age groups. As this might sound ‘weird’ for a modern westerner, think about the educational system. In elementary and high-school, children are always in classes with children of the same age. As with other societies, children might be all playing together, regardless of age and sex.

Diamond ends this chapter with a note on the many differences that there are between various societies. And although the differences might be extreme in some cases, in other cases we might be able to learn from one another.

The Treatment of Old People

Cherish, Abandon, or Kill?, concerns the elderly. this chapter is in line with the previous chapter on children, but now regards the elderly. Modern western societies might differ from each other. As some societies believe that one should take care of the elder themselves, other societies support the idea of putting your elderly parent in an elderly home and to only sporadically visit them. Traditional hunter-gather societies, however, might oppose these traditions. When an elder is no longer able to take care of his-self, one becomes a liability for the group. This problem can be solved by either; intentionally abandon the elder (Lapps (Saami) of northern Scandinavia, the San of the Kalahari Desert, the Omaha and Kutenai Indians of North America) or to let them wander off in search of a ‘white man’s road’ to never return again (Indians of tropical South America).

Other societies will do their utmost best for elderly to be useful. Some examples of useful elders is the creation of weapons and other needed utilities (Malay Peninsula). In other societies, an elder is able to share knowledge. As many things are not written in books (especially within traditional hunter-gatherer societies), an elder is wise and useful for sharing all his knowledge with the next generation.

Various factors on why and how to take care of the elder have been touched by this chapter, including: the society’s ability to carry or feed them, their usefulness, and the society’s values, which tend to reflect that usefulness but are also to some degree independent of usefulness. Compared to the status of the elderly in traditional societies, what has changed today? One set of factors has changed enormously for the better, but many other factors have changed for the worse.

The good news is that older people enjoy on the average much longer lives, far better health, far more recreational opportunities, and far less grief from deaths of their children than at any previous time in human history.

Offsetting that good news is much bad news, some of it a straightforward consequence of demography. The ratio of old people to children and productive young workers has soared, because birth rates have dropped while survival rates of the elderly have risen. Another obvious negative consequence of those demographic facts is that society’s burden of supporting the elderly is heavier, because more older people require to be supported by fewer productive workers.
Part Four – Danger and Response

Constructive Paranoia

The fourth part of the book is about constructive paranoia. In Diamonds first trip to New Guinea, he spent a month with a group of New Guineans, studying birds on a forest covered mountain. Because he wanted to identify the bird species living at higher elevation, they decided to move their gear a few thousand feet up the mountain. Diamond founded a place to erect their tents, a base of a glorious giant of a forest tree, with a thick straight trunk covered with moss. Delighted at the prospect of spending a week in such a beautiful surroundings, Diamond asked his New Guinea companions to build a platform for their tents. To his astonishment, his companions became agitated and refused to sleep there. They explained that the tall tree was dead: “so it might fall over on our camp and kill us”. Diamond was surprised at their overreaction and objected: “It’s a huge tree. It looks still solid. It’s not rotten. No wind could blow it over and there isn’t wind here anyway. It will be years before this tree falls over!”. But his New Guinea friends remained frightened and sleep rather exposed out in the open area instead of in the tent under the tree.

Diamond thought that their fears were absurdly exaggerated and verged on paranoia. But in his months of camping in New Guinea forests went on. He noticed that, at least once on almost every day, he head a tree falling somewhere in the forest. He also listened to stories of New Guineans killed by tree-falls. He realized that New Guineans spent much of their lives camped in the forest. Perhaps a hundred nights a year, about 4,000 nights over their 40-year expected lifespan. He figured out that: “If you do something that involves a very low probability of killing a person – say, just once in a thousand times that you do that something – but you do it a hundred times per year, then you are likely to die in about 10 years, instead of living out your expected lifespan of 40 years”. That risk of falling trees doesn’t deter New Guineans from going into the forest. But they do reduce the risk by being careful not to sleep under dead trees. Diamond stated that: Their paranoia makes perfect sense. I now think of it as “constructive paranoia”.

In this chapter Diamond describes three incidents that befell him in New Guinea, and that illustrate constructive paranoia or the lack of it. He will discuss the types of danger faced by traditional societies, and the ways in which people estimate, misestimate, and deal with danger.

A night visit

His first incident. One morning, Diamond set out from a large village with a group of 13 New Guinea Highlanders to reach an isolated small village several days’ walk away. Diamond learned from New Guineans that the prowler at night was well known in that district – as a crazy, dangerous, powerful sorcerer. The prowler killed numerous local people, including two of his wives and also his eight-year-old son just because the boy ate a banana without his father’s permission. It all happened at the same village that Diamond now was visiting.

Anyway the goal of their trip was to explore the mountains. “The first day’s walk was not bad, but the second day was one of the most gruelling hikes of my career in New Guinea” mentioned Diamond. After a long day of walking, all of the guys were quickly failing asleep. After some hours, probably midnight, Diamond became awakened by a soft sound of footsteps and a sense of the ground shaking from someone walking nearby. The sound and motion stopped, evidently because the unknown person was standing near the rear of Diamonds tent, near his head. He assumed that it was one of his companions and felt in sleep. Within a short time he was awakened again, this time by voices from the shelter who were talking and by the bright light from their fire, which they had stirred up. Diamond knew that wasn’t unusual so he felt in sleep again. When he woke up the next morning he greeted the New Guineans. They told Diamond that their voices and their stirring up the fire that night had been caused by several of them being awakened by the presence of a strange man standing at the open front of their tarpaulin. When the stranger realized that he was being watched, he made a gesture. At that gesture, some of the New Guineans called out in fear. The strange man then ran off into the rainy night.

A couple days later Diamond was still confused about the incident what happened by night. He was wondering what the sorcerer intending to do when he came into their camp last night. He stated that if he had the experience of New Guinea then he probably would react totally different. He didn’t know enough then to read the warning signs and to exercise constructive paranoia.
A boat accident

In the second incident, Diamond and his New Guinea friend Malik were on an island off Indonesia New Guinea and wanted to get themselves and their to the New Guinea mainland. On a clear afternoon, more than two hours before sunset, Diamond and Malik joined four other passengers in a wooden canoe about 30 feet long, with a crew of three young men.

The canoe set off, and the crew soon had the engines up to full speed, through waves several feet high. After a while more large quantities of water came in. Suddenly more and more water splashed in. The crew ingorned the water and increase the speed of the canoe. The next few seconds, as the canoe settled lower into the ocean, were a blur. Diamond was scared that he would trapped under the canoe’s plastic awning as it sank. Everyone decided to get out of the canoe into the ocean. At a certain moment everyone was in panic and they saw the canoe was sinking. Also all the luggage drove in the ocean. At some point Diamond thought that: “If I did survive, I should stop obsessing about thing in life less important than survival”.

In the meanwhile it became darker and the waves become bigger. At a certain moment Diamond and the others saw three small sails of sailing canoes coming from the mainland. All the people started to wave and shout. The sail of the nearest sailing canoe was getting closer. When it was at a small distance the canoe stopped and dropped its sail. After a while they almost reached mainland, one of the victims had to pay the canoe guy for saving their life.

The next day Diamond fell into a conversation with a man. Diamond told him what had happened to him on the previous day. The man answered he had also been on the same island the previous day and he also wanted to take a canoe. At that moment he saw that the crew, gunned the engines and handled the canoe coming in to shore to await passenger. The man decided that he didn’t want to risk his life with that crew and boat. After that Diamond realized that the accident had ultimately been his own fault. He mentioned that: “I should have exercised constructive paranoia myself, and I would now do so for the rest of my life”.

Just a stick in the ground.

The most recent incident had convinced Diamond of the virtues of constructive paranoia. Out of New Guinea’s lowlands rise many separate isolated mountain ranges. One particular mountain range interested Diamond because it was isolated. There were only two possible means to reach this mountain, one is to be flow directly by helicopter and the other method is to find a village close enough to the mountain and then walk from the village to climb the mountain.

Diamond took the last option. He had only two problems, finding a helicopter and obtaining permission and help from local New Guinean land-owners. The big question was: “What to do when there were no signs of humans anywhere near the peak and whom should he contact?”. He knew, from personal experience, that there were nomads moving around. His failure to locate any signs of nomads near his intended peak had two consequences. First, who claims to mountain and second who to ask for permission.

After a while Diamond went back to the U.S. to plan a helicopter based expedition to that landslide. Finally when the project was ready to begin Diamond assembled four New Guinea friends from mountains several hundred miles away. The helicopter flight carried him and the rest and their supplies to the campsite. Diamond bought a small radio and arranged that the helicopter would circle their camp every five days to check if everything was OK. Then Diamond could talk with the pilot by radio to confirm that they were OK.

On the third day of their project, Diamond was at last ready to climb to the peak, following his New Guinea friends. At the top he spotted some interesting birds. After a while they decided to go back. Suddenly his companion stopped and bent over. He pointed at a stick in the ground. They discussed about how the stick came into the ground. His friend thought there maybe would have been other people around. Diamond thought it felt of a tree into the ground.

After 19 days when the helicopter came back to pick them up, the mystery of the broken stick was still unresolved. Diamonds guess was that his friend’s constructive paranoia was in this case unjustified. His constructive paranoia was probably an appropriate reaction of an experienced.

Diamond conclusions about the three incidents: “While the underlying caution that I term constructive paranoia has struck me frequently among New Guineans, I don’t want to leave the misimpression that they are thereby paralyzed and hesitant to act”.

Summary
Lions and Other Dangers

In this part Diamond gives several example of dangers of traditional life. Also he gives advices about survive and be aware of the dangers.

Dangers of traditional life

In this part Diamond give two examples of traditional dangers in life. First one is about Melvin Konner. Konner had a friend Kung who’ve lived in the Kalahari involved driving lions and hyenas. Now Melvin brought his friend to a town with a car. Kalahari was scared because he never had been in a car. The second one is about Sabine Keugler who grew up in New Guinea’s forest. She went to school in Switzerland where were a lot of cars. She had a similar reaction like the first example.

Diamond mentioned that people in every society faces dangers, but the particular dangers differ among societies. One could add that traditional lifestyles are overall more dangers than the Western lifestyle.

Vigilance

In any dangerous environment, accumulated experience teaches rules of behaviour to minimize the risk, rules worth following even if an outsider considers it overreacting. Diamond mentioned that a common Western reaction to danger is that he had never, encountered among experienced New Guineans is to be macho, to seek or enjoy dangerous situations, or to be pretend unafraid and try to hide one’s own fear.

Human violence

In this part Diamond discuss about how do people in traditional societies without state government and police protect themselves against the constant danger of violence. He thinks that a part of the answer is that they adopt many forms of constructive paranoia. On rule he mentioned is to beware of strangers. Another good tactic to reduce the risk of attack is that the locations of villages are commonly chosen for the purpose of defence or maintaining a good view over the surroundings.

Diseases

In this part Diamond gives an example of a disease. A local handed him some biscuit, that he thoughtfully brought from a camp as a snack. After a few hours Diamond had a diarrhea attack. The problem was he never opened the packet biscuit himself. So he was not sure what happened with the biscuits. It’s important to know what happened with local food. So don’t accept anything that’s already opened.

Starvation

In February 1913, Wollaston decided to reach one the highest mountain. On his path he found two recently dead bodies. After a while, when he explored a small village. He recognized that the whole group was responsible for those two dead bodies. People in small-scale societies share food so that either no one starvers or else many people do simultaneously. Diamond mentioned that under most circumstances, when people become seriously malnourished, something else occurs to kill them before they die purely of starvation and nothing else.
Part Five – Religion Language and Health

What Electric Eels Tell Us About the Evolution of Religion

Diamond looks at religion and shows examples that it is widespread and that all societies in time have had some sort of religion and that it thus fills a need humans have. He questions what that need is. Researchers from the last 150 years have questioned the function of religion, because it has a huge cost on the life of people in that group. You need to spend a lot of time and money to be a good Christian for example. You need to pray several times a day and help the church moneywise. There needs to be a reason people do this, that it actually evolves with us and advantages of religion even help us evolve.

In the next chapters the Diamond explains that religion was not probably invented by someone as the product it is today and with the functions it has today, but that religion is a by-product of something else. He shows an example of fish with an electric field. Fish use the electric field they have around them to detect prey and to navigate. Evolution has made this electric field stronger and stronger, to which over time, a particular fish has evolved to what the eel is today. A fish with a strong electric field, which it can use, not only to detect prey and to navigate, but also to attack prey. This by-product has evolved during time.

The reason we believe religion might be a by-product is because our brains have been developed for long enough to always look for reasons why things happen. We have been and always will be looking for a causal relationship. For instance, we attribute agency to other people. In early days, people used to attribute agency to non-human agents like rivers, the wind or the sun. Picturing a god-like creature carrying the sun is supported by the facts those early humans had by then.

“In short, what we now term religion may have arisen as a by-product of the human brain’s increasing sophistication at identifying causal explanations and at making predictions.”

Religions also seem to agree on a super natural being. Something humans are based on. Those beings seem believable because they have attributes or characteristics we, as humans, can dream of. Religions have super natural beings that can see everything, move everything or do everything, but do not exist only on Wednesdays. They are able of what we dream about doing, not of things we don’t find rationally fit for a god.

The other paragraphs state that religion might exist for explanatory, anxiety or comfort reasons. Humans are not able of dealing with life themselves and might create a super natural being to explain why they exist, comfort them in uncertain times and remove anxiety because something is watching them.

Diamond discusses the fact that religion are only apparent in larger tribes and chiefdoms, because only those large societies have the organizational features to support full-time priests, chiefs, tax collectors etc. Religion was the base for organizational structures that we know in the new society. Some of the countries still invoke the religion as the basis of the political organization (see Islamic Countries, but also the USA where the president still intones: “God bless America”).

When the chiefdoms emerged, there was always the danger of different bands or tribes in that chiefdom to attack one another. Rules of peaceful behavior were needed to have a peaceful chiefdom. The rules are enforced by the leaders and their agents, who justify the rules by a new function of religion. Now religion doesn’t have to be used to follow the rules, because it is ingrained into the society. As Voltaire remarked cynically: “If god did not exist, he would have to be invented.”

In the Appendix a table is shown what the main reasons behind religion are.
**Speaking in Many Tongues**

In the large modern societies, everybody speaks the same language, while in the traditional societies a lot are multilingual.

“**In short, bilingual or multilingual people have constant unconscious practice in using executive control. They are forced to practice it whenever they speak, think, or listen to other people talking—i.e., constantly throughout their waking hours.**”

Diamond discusses different studies where monolinguals have much more difficulty than bilinguals at accommodating to a switch in rules. In other tests, bilinguals also perform better (even small children already perform better, when changing the rules in a test). Therefore Diamond discusses the fact that it is bad that languages disappear because in a chiefdom only one language is spoken.

The world’s 7,000 languages are enormously diverse in a wide range of respects. There are a lot of evidences for past extinctions of languages. Language is an important aspect to understand each other. Something he struggled with during his trip. Besides, there are so many more dialects. It’s impossible to communicate with everybody all over the world.

Despite of all the languages and dialects, Diamond mentioned that it is important to protect languages. He gives an example about the Dutch government, they give support to the Frisian language (spoken by about 5% of the Netherlands’ population), and that the New Zealand government gives to the Maori language (spoken by under 2% of New Zealand’s population). It can be very important for the local people to speak their own language. They often learn their children the same spoken language.

**Alzheimer’s disease**

Alzheimer’s disease is the commonest form of dementia of old age, affecting about 5% of people over the age of 75, and 17% of those over the age of 85. It begins with forgetfulness and a decline of short-term memory, and it proceeds irreversibly and incurably to death within about 5 to 10 years. The disease is associated with brain lesions, detectable by autopsy or by brain-imaging methods. To prevent it, older people are sometimes urged to play bridge, play challenging online games or solve Sudoku puzzles.

**Diabetes**

Diabetes is described by Diamond as being the ultimate cause of many types of damage. Although diabetes isn’t infectious or rapidly fatal, there is no direct need to reach the highest state of alert, as has been done in the case of AIDS. Nevertheless, the world epidemic of diabetes today, far eclipses the AIDS epidemic, Diamond states. Diabetes slowly reduces the quality of the life of its victims.

Diabetes can be categorized into two types; Type-2 (or non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus) and –the far less common- Type-1 (or insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus). Even though these types can be hard to distinguish, Type-2 diabetes is now increasingly appearing amongst teen-agers.

Diabetes seems to be related to both genes and environments. Although being genetically prone to Diabetes, it is not yet set that you will get Diabetes, as your environment also impacts your susceptibility to diabetes. In addition, proofs of an environmental role in diabetes are illustrated by the tragedies of the two peoples with the societies with the most number of diabetes victims in the world; Pima Indians and Nauru islanders. Even though that both societies survived for thousands of years, being relatively healthy (at least; not having diabetes and eating balanced) they did eventually became prone to diabetes due to external-western influences. In addition to external influences, wealth seem to be of influence on the susceptibility to diabetes.

The advice to avoid the non-communicable diseases (NDCs). as diabetes is called, is so banally familiar Diamond states, that it’s embarrassing to repeat. “the sweet death of diabetes, and other leading 20th-century killers kill us only with our own permission.”
Appendix A