



# **The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?**

*Jared Diamond*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?

Jared Diamond

**The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?** Jared Diamond  
The bestselling author of *Collapse* and *Guns, Germs and Steel* surveys the history of human societies to answer the question: What can we learn from traditional societies that can make the world a better place for all of us?

Most of us take for granted the features of our modern society, from air travel and telecommunications to literacy and obesity. Yet for nearly all of its six million years of existence, human society had none of these things. While the gulf that divides us from our primitive ancestors may seem unbridgeably wide, we can glimpse much of our former lifestyle in those largely traditional societies still or recently in existence. Societies like those of the New Guinea Highlanders remind us that it was only yesterday—in evolutionary time—when everything changed and that we moderns still possess bodies and social practices often better adapted to traditional than to modern conditions. *The World Until Yesterday* provides a mesmerizing firsthand picture of the human past as it had been for millions of years—a past that has mostly vanished—and considers what the differences between that past and our present mean for our lives today.

This is Jared Diamond's most personal book to date, as he draws extensively from his decades of field work in the Pacific islands, as well as evidence from Inuit, Amazonian Indians, Kalahari San people, and others. Diamond doesn't romanticize traditional societies—after all, we are shocked by some of their practices—but he finds that their solutions to universal human problems such as child rearing, elder care, dispute resolution, risk, and physical fitness have much to teach us. Provocative, enlightening, and entertaining, *The World Until Yesterday* is an essential and fascinating read.

## The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies? Details

Date : Published December 31st 2012 by Viking (first published October 19th 2012)

ISBN : 9780670024810

Author : Jared Diamond

Format : Hardcover 512 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Anthropology, Science, Sociology, Cultural

 [Download The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Tradi ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Tra ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies? Jared Diamond**



# **From Reader Review The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies? for online ebook**

**Hans G. says**

Jared Diamond is quite famous for his well-argued "geographical hypothesis" for helping to explain global (continental) inequality (*Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*). This can be contrasted with the "cultural hypothesis" which relies more heavily on the role culture plays in explaining the social evolution and dissemination of technology (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings* (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)). These positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can be complementary. Indeed Diamond has argued for long-term periods and concerning "continental" trends the "geographical hypothesis" is more important, while for short-term periods and sub-continental or regional trends the "cultural hypothesis" takes precedence.

Thus, according to Diamond if Historian's fail to explain the broadest patterns and exclusively focuses on cultural aspects, there is a large moral gap in our understanding of human society and social being. Likewise if there is an over focus on geography and technology, then there is a large moral gap in our anthropological understanding of day-to-day existence.

In "The World Until Yesterday" Diamond attempts a greater synthesis than he has in his previous two books.

This book will be a very interesting antidote toward Ian Morris's (*The Measure of Civilization: How Social Development Decides the Fate of Nations*) to be released in January 2013. I have also read an advanced copy of Morris's book, very little new in his book from his (*Why the West Rules--for Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future*). In Diamond's new book there is much new material, not necessarily in full agreement with his "geographical hypothesis."

In this new book "The World Until Yesterday" the focus is on so-called tribal societies. Clearly, much more than in his recent work his focus is honed in on cultural factors. Diamond believes traditional societies have much to offer civil societies of modernity. Cultures of tribal society are capable of enriching our culture and lives today.

Diamond maintains the watershed moment is the rise of state government and systems of law and courts.

In tribal society a dispute would have to be solved face-to-face between members. Diamond does not argue the face-to-face interaction is necessarily better than legal court systems for resolving disputes, but to point out the difference are important and certain advantages do exist for tribal organization.

Likewise Diamond is interested in how individuals in tribal society bring up their children, how elderly are cared-for, the role of religion, health, how we deal of danger and treats, etc. Again Diamond emphasizes there are strong differences between tribal and modern societies, some good some bad.

Diamond is famous for his Pulitzer Prize-winning book "Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies." In it he develops and defends a version of environmental determinism, attempting to explain why Europeans were able to conquer and colonize other nations around the world. His thesis argued Europe had an environmental advantage of plentiful plants and animals. The environmental advantage was the basis of disease immunity, greater health, etc, stimulating technological innovation and political organization and offering tremendous economic advantage.

The 'negation' of "Guns, Germs and Steel" is taken up in his next book "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed" (Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed: Revised Edition). The thesis in "Collapse" is how environmental misfortunes and catastrophes help to explain the extinction of cultures and civilizations.

"The World Until Yesterday" makes Diamond's three books a true trilogy. Here he is arguing that societies of the past don't only collapse, but offer us insights into how to organize our own civilization to avoid collapse and extinction ourselves. For example he argues multilingualism has benefits. That certain dietary practices (e.g. too much salt and sugar) are bad for the individual, but also for the survival of civilization.

As alluded above, Diamond is also interested in how treating our elderly and our infants and toddlers, young children more generally contribute to survival or collapse of civilization. Thus, bad parenting is not merely an individual event, but has consequences for civilization itself. Diamond also analyzes institutions of religion and their function in the successful reproduction of society.

As in his previous books, Diamond is impressive in his synthesis of anthropology, evolutionary biology, sociology, human nutrition and physiology, economics, and linguistics. This is arguably the best book of the three. Although Diamond is rather elusive with conclusions, normative pronouncements are abundant. He clearly finds great merit in "traditional" practices of previous and current societies. At the same time his environmental/technology determinism shine through to remind us "progress" happens for a reason. Thus, his normative pronouncements are rather circumvented to suggest traditional practices may be able to reduce warfare, take better care of children and youth, and provide better care and empathy for the elderly and downtrodden.

Diamond is always a fascinating and fun read. This book seems less of the environmental/technology determinism of his "geographical hypothesis" as argued strongly in his previous work.

It provides much more room for culture. This is important, it is a major contribution to post-formalist anthropology. Five stars for what Diamond writes and develops. Two stars for what he fails to develop. What we can see from studying anthropology is limited. Diamond is groping to bring in culture, but in a far too limiting way. It is remarkably disappointing to discover that what we have to learn from traditional societies (the very subtitle of the book) is to take better care of our children and elderly, to practice better nutrition, and to be kinder to one another. David Graeber's anthropology (Debt) is far more relevant to contemporary society, specifically written to understand power-relations and hegemonic movement of one culture to another. From Graeber we learn how power, debt and money have been used to conquer and control. From Diamond we learn how people should eat more nutritiously and be kinder to one another. Graeber, for me, is far more important and relevant for understanding contemporary society.

---

### **Milton Soong says**

Four stars for content, 3 stars for style.

This is from the author of Guns, Germs, and Steel. I liked that book for the content and insight it presented, but thought that it's too verbose (i.e. lots of repetition of the same idea to get the point across). This book suffers the same issue. Ideally the information can be presented via a series of long form magazine article instead of a tome, but I guess books makes more money..

One difference about this book to his previous is that this work is a combination of history and advocacy. He presents how traditional societies (mostly represented by tribesmen of New Guinea which he is very familiar with, with sprinkling of examples from other native tribes of America and Africa thrown in) differs from ours. The advocacy part then kicks in on what the author think we can learn from these societies. Some folks doesn't like to get preached to when they read history so YMMV.

Some highlights:

- One should not romanticize traditional society, life is harsh. Childhood mortality rate is as high as 2/3. Few lives beyond 40 years old.
  - Binary world view: People you meet are either people you know (kin and family of the same tribe), or they are enemy. A stranger is by definition an enemy (because he is a threat and competitor to your food source).
  - Agriculture is the dividing line: Traditional society = hunter gatherer. Once agriculture is discovered that society will head toward what we call "modern civilization".
  - One is constantly in a state of war. Violence can erupt anytime. Death rate percentage wise is much higher than modern warfare like WW1/WW2.
  - One is immersed with ones tribesmen. People are constantly talking and communicating. Privacy is unknown (adults will be having sex in the same room as their children).
  - Children discover sex much earlier than modern folks. Childhood games often have sexual overtone.
  - There are no law. Cultural custom rules the land (the author has a interesting story about a modern driver who had a hit and run incident and killed a child. Rule number one is after a hit and run you should immediately flee the scene and visit the local police, else the victims family and tribe is likely to lynch you on the spot).
  - All disputes are resolved via arbitration (remember, no law). So a hit and run wrongful death incident will involve you sending out emissary to reps of the victim to work out a "deal".
  - Concept of Justice in this case is very different. The result of dispute resolution is not to establish right and wrong, but to come up with a "deal" so that relationship can be restored to a status quo ante. This is important because any disputes are likely with people close to you (i.e. neighboring tribes) that you will have to deal with later in life. The concept in our world of disputes/crime with strangers doesn't really exist for them.
- This is one part of the custom that the author is advocating for disputes among people you know (i.e. divorce, or inheritance fights) because one want to preserve relationship afterwards. An adversarial court preceding is a bad way to resolve these issues.
- Even if such a "deal" is reach among the principals, it doesn't mean it's settled. A victim's uncle might decide that the deal was not satisfactory, so you then have a blood feud on your hand. You might get an arrow 2 years from now because of this.
  - Dangers abound, so folks are paranoid by our standard.
  - They are much healthier in terms of diseases like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, etc.
  - They are much less healthy in terms of infection, epidemics, etc.
  - They are physically active by our standard.
  - Paleo diet works if you want to lose weight.
  - (late addition) Being a crib bilingual means the person will grow up and handle change better. There are some fascinating experiments outlined in the book to prove this with babies...
- 

**Bettie? says**

BOTW

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r...>

**BBC Blurbs: Drawing upon several decades of experience living and working in Papua New Guinea, Professor Diamond shows how traditional societies can offer an extraordinary window into how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature. Exploring how tribal peoples approach essential human problems, from child rearing to old age to conflict resolution to health, Diamond reminds us that the West achieved global dominance due to specific environmental and technological advantages, but Westerners do not necessarily have superior ideas about how to live well.**

5\* Guns, Germs and Steel

5\* Collapse

4\* The Third Chimpanzee

1\* Why is Sex Fun

3\* The World Until Yesterday

---

### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

I read this because it looks at several groups from Papua New Guinea while exploring the differences between "modern" and "primitive" societies. Since the author spends 7% of his life in Papua New Guinea, at least half the examples of primitive societies come from that area, and he fills in the concepts with research (his own and others', current and historic) from other traditional societies around the world.

There is a lot here - warfare, language, diet, disease, family units. I was most intrigued by the suggestions in the parenting and elderly chapters for what we might want to consider adopting again because of the benefits to personal and societal health. The economic implications were interesting as well, in fact the author suggests that major mistakes like the Harvard endowment debacle of 2008 may have been stalled if they thought more like Papua New Guinea sweet potato farmers.

As a book on Papua New Guinean culture, this isn't where I would start because it includes bits and pieces in a larger context. I only say that since that is why I included it in my (now) three months of reading books from and about New Guinea. But for a book wide in scope about traditional societies, I doubt you'll find anything better! Just don't be surprised if you find yourself having conversations about breastfeeding while you're in the middle of it. It's really inescapable.

---

### **Aaron Arnold says**

This is a frustrating book to review. It touches on a lot of interesting subjects, but avoids discussing many of the most thought-provoking implications. It has sections of research picked almost randomly in support of alternately prudent and ridiculous opinions. It's heavy on analysis, yet it doesn't have many clear prescriptions at all. Its subject is vast, yet his focus is often very narrow. I liked many parts of it, but overall it's unquestionably a step down from his past 2, even though it clearly seems to be a more heartfelt book. In the grand continuum of popular science books, it's much closer to the "pop" end, and even given the fact that

it's impossible to satisfy all types of popular science readers, I have no idea who the target audience is supposed to be. His subject is the cultural practices of several groups of traditional societies, and the lessons that us Westerners can learn from their practices. In a way it's a return to the first chapter of *Guns Germs & Steel*, but instead of asking "how did the West get so advanced?", he's asking "are there things we can still learn from the people we've out-developed?"

It's a reasonable question, and anyone who has devoted any thought to the long-term effects of our overweight, overstressed, overmedicated, atomized modern lifestyles ("WEIRD" in his acronym - Western Educated Industrial Rich Democratic) will find some value in his high-level survey of the ways that traditional societies handle various aspects of the human condition like conflict, child-raising, religion, diet, the role of the elderly, and the like. He tends to split his analysis into either anecdote-heavy descriptive passages that involve his pals in New Guinea, or slightly more rigorous conceptual sections that discuss things like the various functions of religion or the types of political changes that occur when societies grow from a few hundred hunter-gatherers to millions of specialized citizens. There's good stuff in both types of sections, but... (as usual, ignore the first half of any sentence that has a "but..." in it).

My problem with the anecdotal sections is that though the narrative format is a good way to make your points more vivid, it's also a good way to make them less rigorous. It's all very well to tell people that "constructive paranoia" (minimizing risks through careful skepticism) is a helpful way to live, but even though he has some neat stories about mysterious forest sorcerers, almost dying in a canoe accident, and running around on remote mountain peaks, my reaction was basically "cool story bro" - are these either generalizable in any way to Western lives, or even anything more than an over-elaborate way to say "watch out for danger"? He also tosses in anecdotes that are simply absurd, like the one about the Kenyan who didn't like American toys because Kenyan toys were more interactive and better at encouraging mechanical creativity. Hence the global leadership and supremacy of Kenyan industry? Ditto again for stories about how much more isolating modern society is than the constant communication and contact in traditional societies. This is certainly true, but it seems odd to package a criticism of solitary entertainment like TV, video games, or books in the form of a book which can only be appreciated by reading or listening to it alone.

As far as the more data-heavy sections are concerned, I don't think any of the science is outright wrong, but I can see why this book annoys specialists in several scientific fields. Diamond picks really big topics, like *The Role of Religion In Society*, or *The Effects of Increasing Scale On Societal Organization*, and sums them up in a few pages of text and maybe a table or two. This is either admirable trans-specialty synthesis, or over-simplification on an epic scale, and the trend was increasingly towards the latter as the book went on. For example, late in the book he talks about the sharp decrease in global language diversity and the disappearance of many traditional languages. I personally am not very sentimental about languages in and of themselves, even English, and so his pathos-filled arguments for the preservation and continuation of languages with just a few thousand speakers didn't do much for me. Suppressing speakers of Breton is bad, I agree, and I think his advocacy of bilingualism is solid, yet the fact that all languages eventually change or die out doesn't really bother me in a metaphysical sense; that my nth generation descendants might be speaking SpaceMandarin instead of NeoEnglish is fine with me. Also, Diamond correctly points out that death rates from all kinds are much higher in traditional societies than modern ones: are there any evolutionary consequences to this? He doesn't say.

Ultimately I wasn't very satisfied with the book. Certainly we should give more thought to whether the vast changes in lifestyle encouraged by modernity are really good for us in the long run, but I found the evidence that Diamond gave insufficient to conclude that New Guinean highlanders have much to teach us. What made *Guns Germs & Steel* and *Collapse* such good books to me was their rigorous sourcing, his broad



synthesis of those sources, and the careful way his specific claims about imperialism and sustainability emerged from those things. This book is a decent overview of the cultural practices of some groups of traditional societies, but it feels like a huge let-down from those two works, simultaneously too lengthy and too unclear.

Also, the airport frame story technique was almost intolerably Thomas Friedman-esque. Cut that stuff out.

---

## **David says**

You need to know right up front that I am going to really rag on this book. I read every single word of it and feel qualified to tell you it was poor in many respects. It would be so much nicer to praise and compliment Diamond's efforts here but I'd be lying if I told you anything other than "this was a painful experience". If you stick with my review, however, I will tell you toward the end what it takes this author 466 pages to say. (Please don't expect anything revelatory. His conclusions are the very definition of mundane.)

In summary there are some interesting ideas presented in a style that is excessively wordy. Actually he vomits onto the page incessantly. And it's incredibly frustrating because syntax and grammar are generally not his problems. (He does use "regime" when he means "regimen" and wrongly differentiates between Parasitic and Infectious Diseases, but these are minor quibbles.) He simply can't help himself from droning on and on with the result that he is pedantic.

And the repetition is stultifying. Here is just one example:

"In each such case, as I detailed two paragraphs above for Alaska's Inuit, the coastal partner has preferential or sole access to marine or coastal resources such as marine mammals and fish and shells, while the inland partner has preferential or sole access to territorial resources such as game, gardens and forests."

He recognizes that he just said this. So he has to tell us that he just said this. And then he has to say it all over again in his formulaic, textbook fashion. How did this man ever win a Pulitzer Prize?

Many of his ideas are already well-established or so obvious as to be rather anticlimactic. And yet Diamond seems not to understand that. Even the most basic principles are identified and explained (and illustrated) for his reader. Check out this beaut on page 61:

"The first surprise for the Highlanders would have been to discover that our overwhelmingly prevalent method of acquiring an item is not by barter but by paying for it with money (Plate 33)." Turn to plate 33 which is a photograph of a white guy using cash to buy a gallon of paint at the counter of a hardware store. Good Lord...

Other problems include a shifting perspective in favor of third-world views which undermines objectivity. The section titled "Advantages of the Modern World" lists the many reasons members of traditional societies (Aboriginal Pygmies, New Guinea Highlanders, Amazonian Hunters) give for wanting to adopt First World lifestyles; the section titled "Advantages of the Traditional World" lists the many terrible things these same individuals find upon moving to the U.S. Really? These are quite clearly Disadvantages of the Modern World. Why not just say so?

Drum roll, please. Here is what we can all learn from traditional societies:

Do not smoke.

Exercise regularly.

Limit your intake of total calories, alcohol, salt, sugar, saturated fats and processed foods.

Increase your intake of fiber, fruits, vegetables and calcium.

Eat more slowly.

Decrease sedentary activities, especially screen time, unless it comes to meals which should be social/communal and relaxed.

Following this summation, Diamond writes: "This advice is so banally familiar that it's embarrassing to repeat it." Yes, it most certainly is.

Do yourself a favor and don't cause further embarrassment by reading every word of this book like I did. We must all learn from one another's mistakes.

---

## **Laura says**

*From BBC Radio 4 - Book of the Week:*

*The first of five extracts from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond's powerful new book, that asks what can traditional societies teach us about how we in the west live now?*

*2/5. Second extract from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond's powerful new book that draws upon his several decades of experience living and working in Papua New Guinea. Professor Diamond argues that traditional societies offer a window onto how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and can provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature.*

*3/5 Extract from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond's powerful new book that draws upon his several decades of experience living and working in Papua New Guinea. Professor Diamond argues that traditional societies offer a window onto how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and can provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature.*

*4/5 Extract from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond's new book which suggests that traditional societies offer us a window onto how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and can provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature.*

*5/5 Extract from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond's powerful new book which suggests that traditional societies offer a window onto how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and can provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature.*

*Drawing upon several decades of experience living and working in Papua New Guinea, Professor Diamond shows how traditional societies can offer an extraordinary window into how our ancestors lived for millions of years - until virtually yesterday, in evolutionary terms - and provide unique, often overlooked insights into human nature. Exploring how tribal peoples approach essential human problems, from childrearing to old age to conflict resolution to health, Diamond reminds us that the West achieved global dominance due to specific environmental and technological advantages, but Westerners do not necessarily have superior ideas about how to live well.*

*Read by Crawford Logan.*

*Abridged by Robin Brooks.*

*Produced by Kirsteen Cameron.*

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r...>

---

## **Yasin S. says**

Bütün kitaplar?n? okudu?um ve çok sevdi?im Jared Diamond'un bu son kitab?n? okumasam olmazd?. Gayet kolay anla?ılır ve ak?c? bir üslupla yaz?lm?? ve bir çok ki?isel tecrübe ve ilginç bilgi ile donat?lm?? bu kitap bir sohbet havas?nda insan? s?kmayan bir anlat?ma sahip.

Kitapta ilk dikkatimi çeken unsur J.D.'n di?er kitaplar?na nazaran çok daha ki?isel bir kitap olmas?yd?. Belli ki ya?lı? ve bilge Diamond 70 y?lı? a?k?n ömrü boyunca elde etti?i k?ymetli tecrübelerini, ki?isel an?lar?n? ve günümüzün dünyas?na dair yorumlar?n? bilimsel destekleriyle birlikte okurlar? ile payla?mak istemi?.

Kitab?n konusu ise daha aç?k olamazd?. ?smine bakmak yeterli. Onbinlerce y?ll?k insanl?k tarihinde insanlar devlet düzenine sahip olmadan, kabileler alt?nda do?a ile ba? ba?a, y?rt?c? hayvanlar ve di?er tehlikelerle yan yana, resmen orman kanunlar? alt?nda ya?ama ve soyunu devam ettirme mücadelesi vererek nesilden nesile çok k?ymetli hayati tecrübeler edinmi? ve o ?ekilde evrilmil?lerdir. Bu derin geçmi?e k?yasla daha dün denilebilecek bir tarihte ise devletlerin kurulmas?, tar?msal ve yerle?ik hayata geçilmesi, siyasi ve dini örgütlenmeler ve ard?ndan endüstrile?mi? bat?lı? toplumlar?n olu?mas?na tan?k olan insanl?k bu yeni ya?am tarz?n?n keyfini sürmeye ba?lad?. Fakat Diamond'un W.E.I.R.D (Westernized, Educated, Industrial Rich, Democratic) olarak tan?mlad??? bu yeni ya?am biçimi beraberinde insanlar?n daha önce hiç a?ına olmad??? bir çok sorunlar da getirdi. Günümüzün dünyas?nda sadece bir avuç insan izole ya?am alanlar?nda insanlar?n yüzbinlerce y?ld?r al??k?n oldu?u geleneksel ya?am tarz?n? devam ettirirken geriye kalan tüm halklar W.E.I.R.D ya?am tarz?na geçerek bu görece yeni ve insanlar?n al??k?n olmad??? sorunlarla mücadele etmek zorunda kalm??lard?r. Bu sorunlardan bazıları?n? s?zalamak gerekirse geleneksel dillerin ve kültürlerin asimile olmas?, a??r? ?ekerli ve tuzlu besinlerin kolayca temin edilmesi ile gelen obezite, ?eker, kalp hastal?klar? ve kanser çe?itleri, maa?lar, vergiler, i?sizlik ve depresyon, ya?lı?lara olan kötü muamele, gösteri? ve tüketim ç?lg?nl???,hava kirlili?i, kanserojenler, yaln?zlık vs vs. Bu sorunlar?n hiçbiri daha önceki geleneksel ya?am tarz?nda görülmeyen ya da çok ender görülen sorunlarken ?u an hepimizi etkileyen ve hayat kalitemizi dü?üren unsurlar haline geldiler. J.D. tabi ki modern ya?am tarz?n? b?rak?p eski kabile hayat?m?za dönelim demiyor fakat eskiden bu sorunlar olmadan yüzbinlerce y?ll?k hayat tecrübemiz varken neden bunlardan örnek alarak günümüzdeki hayat?m?za farklı yönler katmayal?m ki? diyor basitçe. Kitab?n toplumsal adalet sistemi, çocuk yeti?tirme ve ya?lı?larla olan ileti?im, hastal?klarla mücadele, sava? ve kavgalar, risk alma, din, dil, yeme içme kültürleri gibi bir çok farklı bak?? aç?s?ndan geleneksel ve modern hayat?n ayr?ntılı? ve ?a??rt?c? kar??la?t?rmalar?n? yaparak çok faydalı bilgiler sa?lad??? kesin. Bu konulara olan ilginiz ve merak?n?z varsa okumaktan zevk alaca??n?z? dü?ünüyorum. Yaln?z bu kitap Diamond için oldukça ki?isel bir kitap oldu?undan daha önce başka kitaplar?n? okuyup yazara a?ına olursan?z kitaptan daha fazla zevk alabilirsiniz.

İimdi de gelelim kitabın negatif yönlerine. Bilimi halka aç?klamak misyonunu üzerine alm?? tüm bilim adamlar? teknik jargonu bir yana bırak?p daha net anlat?lmak adına çocu?a anlat?r gibi sık tekrarlamalar yaparak ve zaten anlamad??n?z konuyu anlamad??n?z? farzederek sık?c? detaylara girebiliyor. Diamond bunu hep yapıyor ve bu kitabında da maalesef oldukça fazla tekrar, detaylı anlatım, hatta tepki çekeceğini dü?ündü?ü yerlerde 'vurmayı bırak?n öyle demek istemiyorum' dercesine savunmaya geçmesi biraz okuma keyfini zedeliyor. Tabi belki de böyle yapması'nın kendince sebepleri vardı. Belki daha geniş halk kesimine hitap ettikçe bilim insanlarına gelen tepkiler artarak şiddetleniyordur. Bunun böyle olduğunu tahmin ettiğimden kusura bakmadım. Cahillerle uğraşmak gerçekten zor ve bezdirici olmalı.

İkinci ve en önemli negatif nokta ise yayıncıların ve çevirmenin hataları. Ben bir kitap okurken çevirmeni de il yazar? okumak isterim. Çevirmenlerin kaliteli metinleri kalitesizce çevirmelerini o yazara yapılm?? bir hakaret olarak görüyorum. Zaten kolay anlaşılabilir bir yazım dili kullanan Diamond'un yazıların? çevirmek bu kadar zor olmamalı. Genel okuyucu kitlesini rahatsız etmeyecek kadar da olsa oldukça fazla akıllı almaz çeviri, yazım ve imla hatası barındıran bir kitap. Örneğin;

-Bypass etmek fiili kullanmak

-İngilizce dili demek

-Homo Sapiens'i Homo sapien'ler diye çevirmek

-Hiçte kolay değil - Ya'ay?pta gibi komik dilbilgisi hataları

-G'da saklama usullerinden bahsederken "tenekede" gibi bir çeviri yapması. Sanırım asıl metinde geçen "can" kelimesini konserve olarak çevirse daha mantıklı olacaktı.

gibi hatalar can sıkırsa da o kadar da OCD'niz yoksa keyif alacağını düşünüyorum.

---

## Công says

Một cuốn sách 600 trang, ??c ??n phát m?i :v nh?ng t?u trung l?i c?ng th?y nhi?u ?i?u thú v?. Ph?n I và ph?n II nói v? m?y hình th?c t? ch?c xã h?i ??c ch?i chán, nh?ng v? sau m?y ph?n v? ng??i già, tôn giáo, và s?c kho? ??c r?t th?c t? và h?p đ?n. Không ph?i ch? v? xã h?i truy?n th?ng, tác gi? th?c s? ?ã xây d?ng nên m?i b?c tranh bao quát v? nhi?u l?nh v?c v?i vô vàn th? ?áng h?c h?i trong cu?c s?ng. S?n sàng cho "S?p ???" và "Súng, vi trùng và thép" thôi.

---

## Todd Martin says

Within a relatively short timeframe humans have gone from living as hunter/gatherers in small tribes of a few hundred individuals, to agrarian communities comprised of thousands, to city-states of many millions with a broad division of labor and a representative form of government. This change in the structure of society has resulted in dramatic alterations in lifestyle. While many of these changes have been positive (we live longer, are subject to less violence and have access to many goods and services that were unavailable to our ancestors), some of them are less so (epidemics of obesity and diabetes, and incidents of isolation). In *The World Until Yesterday* Jared Diamond examines traditional societies and the ways in which we may be able to learn from them in our era of sedentary desk jobs and virtual, on-line lives.

Diamond examines such topics as: trade, conflict resolution, treatment of children and the elderly, risk,

religion, language and diet. Although not an anthropologist by training, Diamond is known as a polymath and has spent quite a bit of time with tribes in New Guinea. His experiences lend anecdotal support to the conclusions he draws from anthropological research.

Are there some overarching themes as to what we might learn from studies of traditional people? Well, it's a bit of a mixed bag. Traditional lifestyles tend to be both dangerous and violent. Inter-tribal conflicts result in a higher proportion of violent death (relative to population size) than is found in state-run societies and the incidence of genocide and infanticide are more prevalent. Traditional societies are generally unfamiliar with the scientific method and instead form supernatural explanations of natural events (yes .. we have Pat Robertson, but rational individuals look to science for answers). Finally, many of the activities that surround their daily life are dictated by fear. Whether it's the lion that may be lurking in the grass or a shift in alliances that make interactions with the tribe next door uncertain, life is stressful and requires one to adopt a paranoid mindset (Diamond refers to this as "constructive paranoia") in order to survive.

With that said, there are some aspects of these cultures that we could learn from. In traditional societies, conflict resolution is often performed through a mediator whose goal may include both compensation and emotional closure for the victim. States resolve conflict through a court system which often provides little consolation for those that were harmed. Another area is in our treatment of children and the elderly. Some traditional groups give their children considerable freedom and revere their elders for their experience and knowledge. In state societies these demographics tend to be segregated from the larger population by age, leading to social isolation and little inter-generational learning. Finally, a quick glance at a cross section of our general population makes it abundantly clear that we have become soft, fat and unhealthy. Traditional populations had to work to survive and they only ate what they were able to collect, catch or grow. A sedentary lifestyle coupled with a diet high in fat, salt and sugar has led to a rise in heart disease, stroke and cancer. A return to a diet and active lifestyle that more closely resembles that of our ancestors could result in significant improvements in health.

One area where I take issue with Diamond is with regards to language. There are currently in the neighborhood of 7,000 languages in the world and Diamond predicts that most will have vanished or be well on their way to having become so by the year 2100. He bemoans this loss and urges that heroic measures be taken to preserve them. While I agree with Diamond that language can help preserve a group's cultural identity in the face of the homogenizing influence exerted by the state, I just don't see the loss of a language as a particularly tragic event. It is certainly a people's right to keep their native language alive, and failing that, linguists are certainly welcome to do their best to preserve them if they so choose, but the fact is that most are fading through simple neglect. Young people don't want to learn them and old people that retain these skills are dying. Perhaps it's my lack of sentimentality, but I do not believe it's a tragedy to let nature run its course. All languages change over time. It is active, engaged bodies that keep a language vibrant and alive. A language on life-support that people have forgotten how to speak is not a language at all but a museum piece.

Diamond is one of the few scientists who can write well and explain his subject matter to a lay audience in a way that is interesting. Although the lessons he draws aren't particularly novel or surprising (in fact, most are banal) the information about the various cultures he examines is interesting. Many of the conclusions regarding violence also dovetail nicely with those drawn by Steven Pinker in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. It was a happy coincidence that I read them back to back. I will say, however, that the book went on rather too long and becomes overly repetitive towards the end (I get it, our western diet sucks and we should eat more broccoli ... thanks mom).

---

## David says

This book is a fascinating, comprehensive view of life in several traditional cultures. The best part of the book is the personal insights that Jared Diamond delivers. Diamond spent a lot of time with the peoples of Papua New Guinea, and he enthusiastically describes all facets of their lives. He contrasts their society with other traditional societies living in the Arctic, in Africa, and with modern, Western societies.

There are hundreds of "tribes" living in New Guinea. Many of these tribes have long-standing enmities with their neighbors. It is very dangerous for people to move from one area to another, because of vendettas that span across generations. Many people have never traveled more than a few miles from the place where they were born. Some people who live within 50 or 100 miles of the coast *are not even aware of the ocean*. As a result, their languages and customs remain distinct from one another.

This is a wonderful book, because Diamond describes the societies from first-hand knowledge, living among people in New Guinea. He has many interesting stories to tell, including a number from his first-hand experiences there. I especially like the story about his bird-watching expedition into an isolated region by helicopter, over 20 miles from the nearest inhabitants. All went swimmingly, until he came to a small clearing, where a guide pointed out a small stick with a few leaves stuck in the ground. Such an innocuous object was alarming to the guide, as it implied that the territory had recently been visited--and perhaps claimed--by others.

The book does tend to repeat unnecessarily, and occasionally to ramble. Towards the end of the book, Diamond makes a point of showing how the diets of traditional societies may be healthier than Western diets. People in traditional societies rarely are overweight, get diabetes, heart disease, and so on. This is an excellent point, although Diamond turns the chapter into a sort of self-help manual. I enjoyed his emphasis, but it was sort of distracting.

---

## Andrew says

It's always exciting when Jared Diamond publishes a new book and the advance copies were hugely sought after when they arrived at the office in October. This is the most personal of Diamond's books, with many anecdotes from his work in New Guinea. It reads like the book he's always wanted to write. The title is a comment that, in the context of history, we all, until recently, lived in traditional societies and Diamond describes key elements of that lifestyle. I found the beginning, where Diamond compares and contrasts traditional and modern societies, especially with reference to the execution of justice, forced. But the explicit drawing of lessons from traditional societies soon ends, leaving the reader to draw their own conclusions, and from here the book is an excellent and flowing read. Diamond effortlessly discusses, among other things, childhood, safety, religion, and language, describing how every society's structures are responses to particular contexts. He ends with observations about the fate of traditional societies today which points to where we ourselves may be heading. *The World Until Yesterday* is the natural extension of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Collapse* as a masterly commentary on humanity and society.

I'm on Twitter: @Dr\_A\_Taubman

---

## Keith Swenson says

Consider me a big Jared Diamond fan. I read *Guns, Germs, and Steel* twice, *Collapse* once, and have watched all the video documentaries. There is no question that Diamond is a consummate researcher and will always have a special place in helping me understand how human societies have come about.

This book, however, was a vague disappointment. Not because the book was bad, but because I had such high expectations of it. It seemed to me that he had a bunch of notes and journal entries left over that did not fit into the earlier works, and now here they are, jumbled together with an attempt at an overall theme, but more jumble than theme.

What I did find fascinating is the view of the primitive cultures in New Guinea. I personally have no feeling for what these cultures are like, and this book will give you a certain feeling and understanding. Death and murder is a part of everyday life. Particularly poignant is the Inuit who will probably be killed for trespassing, even when the trespassing was completely accidental, caused by ice breaking off and drifting into another tribe's territory. Our modern state-oriented sense of fairness rebels at the idea that both sides know that no fault is assigned, and yet killing has nothing to do with fault. We certainly take it for granted that we can stop the car in any small town in America, get out, and walk around with really a very low chance of any problem. A native New Guinean lives in a 7 mile radius, not because they lack curiosity or stamina to go further, but because it is incredibly dangerous to do so.

Chapter 2 is about accidents and justice, and how restoring relationship is the goal in traditional cultures, while in state societies justice means either punishment or compensation.

Chapter 3 & 4 is about war and violence. He does highlight the differences between traditional cultures and ours.

Chapter 5 is about raising children, while chapter 6 was about how the old are treated. Some hints of a romantic idea that kids are so much better when they have to make their own toys, however infant mortality and accident rates are shockingly high. While it was interesting to see the differences, these chapters did not leave me with any real idea of how we might learn from these.

Chapter 7 was a very very detailed account of a boat accident he endured, and the only point was that someone else, a native, had noticed the crew of the boat was misbehaving and decided not to be on the boat. The point? Some natives have a sense of danger that we westerners don't have. At the same time, we westerners have a sense in our environment of what is and is not dangerous as well. Why would anyone be surprised at this? The real message: people know their own world better than foreigners. Chapter 8 follows this with further interesting stories of native differences.

Chapter 9 launches into a discussion of religion, and this chapter feels as if it was pulled from a completely different book. Clearly he has done a lot of thinking about this, and did not have enough material for a whole book on the subject, so this became chapter 9. Maybe the best chapter, but at the same time, understand that the same kind of hard evidence from the rest of the book is simply not possible on the subject of religion.

Chapter 10 is a shallow argument that everyone should be a polyglot. He explains that there are 7000 languages, and the median language spoken by few thousand people. Surprisingly, in these traditional

cultures, there are many languages spoken in a small area, and literally everyone speaks a handful of languages. He gives some evidence that people who are bilingual do better at something than monolingual people, and this is done with the standard backdrop of how sad it is that so many people in the USA are monolingual. This is followed by weeping and moaning for languages that are being "steamrolled" out of existence by modern states. However, he never once gives a reason that the world should have 7000 languages. Most of these languages are only spoken (never written) and he never explains why there is any harm at the loss of a language after the last speaker dies. Similarly, there is no assessment of the value of a common language, although we all know this is incredibly valuable today. This chapter was romantic and quite frankly unconvincing.

Chapter 11 is on diet. Clearly, the modern diet is not healthy, and clearly we have a chronic problem with diabetes today. He gives plenty of evidence that this is a modern world (cultural) problem and not any kind of racial problem: what I mean is that traditional people when they take up the modern lifestyle fall prey to all these problems equal to those who had many generations in the lifestyle. This is a worthy message, however the problem is complex, and no solution is provided. We know people need to be more active, and traditional cultures are generally more active. So in the end, not much real new insight comes out of this.

That is about it: a few viewpoints of the differences of modern world compared to traditional world, backed up by copious, very detailed notes. Diamond remains one of the most important people to read, but not for this book.

---

## **Tevfik says**

Jared Diamond'un her kitabı ufkumu fersah fersah açmıtır. Bu de öyle yaptı. Gerçekten insanın dünyaya ve toplumlara olan bakışını deşitirebilen bir yazar. Bir hezarfen olmasının bunda çok büyük etkisi var. Olaylar pek çok farklı boyuttan ele alabiliyor.

Düne kadar dünya, günümüzdeki avcı toplayıcı toplulukların bizlerin düne kadarki hallerine karşı geldiği varsaymayla, geçmiştiki sosyal kurumlarla günümüzdekileri karşılaştırıyor. Her sosyolog, antropolog, kültür ve sanat tarihçisinin okuması, kütüphanesinde bulundurması gereken bir eser diye düşünüyorum.

Yayın için de küçük bir notum var: Redaksiyon pek iyiysen son iki bölümde aksıyor. Yer yer unutulmuş kelimeler, anlatım bozuklukları belirtmeye başlıyor. Kitabın kalitesinden olsa gerek, redaktör sonlara doğru sıkılmı galiba :)

---

## **Hadrian says**

Jared Diamond is most famous for introducing a sort of ecological-determinism to public thought with *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, in which he introduces material context as a defining factor for the economic and social development of civilizations.

Here, Diamond focuses more on a social/cultural context, comparing pre-agricultural societies, such as those from his beloved New Guinea, to our WEIRD societies. WEIRD is not solely a sly dig at our lifestyles, but instead shorthand for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and 'Developed' - a handy, but incomplete



description of his audience. (The missing segment being East Asia). By contrast, Diamond compares this image of the world to tribal societies, ranging from the Inupiat in Alaska to the !Kung in the Kalahari to the Aborigines of Australia and New Zealand. The topics of his comparison are extremely broad, occasionally overlapping, and range from trite to tremendous.

For example - in the section on law, crime, and punishment, he makes a comparison to personal arbitration to the vast 'impersonality' of the justice system. This, however, is the result of the larger size of non-tribal societies, and of the 'social contract'.

His section on war is a retread of some of Pinker's discussions in the early parts of *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* - tribal wars are intimate, long-standing, generational conflicts of extermination. You know the other person or enemy you are killing, and you want them dead. Modern wars, at least for the technologically advanced nations, are push-button, impersonal affairs. He notes how some societies suffer comparatively large attrition due to warfare, and how even the German-Soviet Front of the Second World War had a smaller proportion of casualties over a similar period. Then again, it is easier to kill 10% of 200 people than it is to kill 10% of 200 million.

The section on childcare is one where Pinker's criticisms are most relevant. He notes the practice of 'allo-parenting', with childcare being split among parents and relatives, the benefits of playing outside, and the benefits of using creative toys and education. Diamond does note the extremes of alternate societies (Don't let children play with fire, for example), but here his criticisms and sketches are of most interest.

Likewise, his discussion of isolation and the role of social networks is particularly revealing. In a group of 150 people at most, you are intimately connected with every other person you know, for better or worse. Our world does not necessarily have this, again due to the sheer scale of our cities and organizational units. It is interesting to note that a New Guinea tribesman who moves to our world is most satisfied with their new 'anonymity', where they don't always have to conform to ritual.

The section on food and diet is painfully obvious. Don't eat too much sugar and salt. Don't be sedentary. Exercise. Non-congenital diseases are the big killers of the industrialized world, and many are contingent upon our personal lifestyles.

Diamond's examination of the role of languages and multilingualism alternates between reasonable and puzzling. He is a fierce advocate of multilingualism - but is anyone not? Who would willingly confine themselves to knowing one language? This section ends with the preservation of languages, which seems vaguely reasonable enough.

His section on religion had a lot of potential, but again fell short. He describes some 15 or 16 alternate theories for religion, but again only analyzes two. He could have discussed early theories about how religion served as the foundation of non-tribal civilization with recent discussion of archaeological sites. But instead we get some very woolly thinking about how religion means different things in different times and places to different people.

As for his discussion on the origins of paranoia, he views it as a largely beneficial construct, as there are indeed many things out there which could kill you. This leads into more familiar talk on how people fear terrorism more than car crashes, plane crashes more than heart disease, and so forth.

Diamond notes that some societies have such abbreviated average lifespans that the role of elderly care is not always immediate. When he visited some tribes in New Guinea at age 46, many members were astonished

and thought he was 'half-dead'. However, it does not take tribal research to find criticism with the models of 'retirement homes' and 'forced retirement', with one of the better alternatives being allowing them to work in preferred fields, but in an advisory/mentor role, or staying at home to help with childcare/familial tasks.

One of the most curious omissions is that of the role of women in society. I would have fascinated to see if there was a matriarchal or matrilineal society, or at least a more elaborate discussion of what tribes did, and our contrasts to them.

He does not advocate dropping everything and returning to hunter-gatherer societies. The book is muddled at times, but this is not from any deficiency of the author's so much as it is a result of the sheer enormity of the ambitions of his subject. Could only 400 pages be enough to make a complete comparison of the pre-industrial pre-agricultural world and ours? A world which, after all, is only a footfall away from ours in a biological-evolutionary perspective, but nearly eternal in the fragile spans of our own memories? For all of its numerous flaws, post-industrial society has brought us some freedom from disease, want, ignorance, and distance, if we were lucky enough to be born into that. As flawed as the book is, it has the sense to ask the right questions, and may yet lead to a distant answer.

---

### **Aaron Thibeault says**

\*A full executive summary of this book is available here: <http://newbooksinbrief.com/2013/01/15...>

The main argument: The onset of agriculture and farming some 11,000 years ago (termed the Neolithic Revolution), is arguably the most significant turning point in the history of our species. Agriculture induced a major population explosion, which then led to urbanization; labor specialization; social stratification; and formalized governance—thus ultimately bringing us to civilization as we know it today. Prior to the Neolithic Revolution—and extending back time out of mind—human beings lived in a far different way. Specifically, our ancestors lived in small, largely egalitarian tribes of no more than 50 to 100 individuals, and hunted and foraged for their food.

The transition from our traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle, to early farming (and herding), to civilization as we know it now (which, on an evolutionary time-scale, occurred but yesterday) has certainly brought with it some very impressive benefits. Indeed, many of us today enjoy comforts and opportunities the likes of which our more traditional ancestors would never have dreamed of. However, it cannot be said that the transition from traditional to modern has left us without any difficulties. Indeed, some would go so far as to say that the problems that civilization has introduced outweigh the benefits that it has brought; and even the most unromantic among us are likely to agree that our experiment in civilization has not been an unmitigated success.

This then brings us to the problem of solving the difficulties that civilization has left us with. Now, when it comes to solving our problems, it is without a doubt the spirit of our age to look ever forward for solutions—by which I mean we tend to look for new technologies and hitherto untested arrangements to help us out of our current predicaments. However, when we consider that our traditional lifestyle served us well for millennia on end, and that it was under this lifestyle wherein we underwent much of the biological and psychological evolution that lives with us to this day, we can begin to see how it may be fruitful to look back at this traditional lifestyle for possible solutions to the problems we now face. (This idea is not new; indeed, the 'state of nature' has traditionally been of great interest to philosophers—for it has been thought that understanding how we lived by nature may serve as a guide to help us design the most fitting political

communities given our present circumstances).

Also of interest here—and deeply connected to the more practical goal mentioned above—is that investigating our traditional way of life promises to shed light on our underlying human nature in a way that is not possible when we look at ourselves through the obscuring artifice of civilization. It is these things that we stand to gain by learning about traditional societies, and it is this very project that geographer Jared Diamond takes up in his new book *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?*

Diamond is certainly not one to deny that civilization has brought with it many important benefits over our traditional way of life (the most important of which, according to the author, being that state governments are much more effective at ending the cycles of violence that tend to plague traditional societies). However, Diamond does contend that there are many areas wherein traditional practices represent an improvement over how we do things in the modern world, and that these practices could (and should) be incorporated into our modern way of life (both at the personal and societal level). Specifically, we could afford to learn a thing or two from traditional societies when it comes to conflict resolution (how to re-establish and mend relationships); raising children (that it really does take a whole village to raise a child); treating the elderly (that they are deserving of respect, and are still capable of contributing to the community in many important ways); approaching risk (with extensive caution); communicating (in a face to face way, and with multiple languages); and in diet and exercise (favoring natural foods, reducing salt, and sugar intake, and adopting a more active lifestyle).

In the course of his exploration of traditional societies, Diamond also delves into why and how our ancestors transitioned from traditional societies to civilizations (with a focus on such areas as social, economic and political stratification, and also religion).

Diamond has made a career out of studying the traditional societies of Papua New Guinea, and is therefore a very credible authority on the subject matter at hand. What's more, his wealth of experience has left him with a trove of interesting and illuminating anecdotes to draw from, and these are on full display here. Finally, I felt that the author always maintained a very sober and balanced view with regards to the benefits and drawbacks of both traditional and modern societies. I would have liked to have seen certain topics discussed more, and others less, but this is mere personal preference. Altogether a very good book. A full executive summary of this book is available here: <http://newbooksinbrief.com/2013/01/15...> A podcast discussion of the book is also available.

---

### **Lesley says**

Fascinating book comparing the world of hunter-gatherers with our own. In many ways the hunter-gatherers seem to have a better life! And many wise observations as a result.

Was also struck that many of the customs and qualities which Diamond describes as being those of hunter-gatherers actually continue in Japan.

---

### **Petra X says**

Book of the year, 2013, for me. 7 pure gold, very twinkly, high-in-the-sky stars. If you like anthropology and

history you'll like this. If you don't think you like those subjects, you might still like this because it is wonderfully well-written and very enlightening.

If I ever get round to reviewing again, ie. if I ever get over being pissed off at Goodreads for turning into an authors' marketplace, for deleting and censoring reviews and shelves, for sharing my reviews, all of them, with Google when I denied permission, then this will be one of the first books I will review.

---

### **Natalie says**

While THE WORLD UNTIL YESTERDAY isn't exactly captivating reading, it's a book most will have been glad they read. I found the chapters on child rearing, elder care, dispute resolution, risk, and nutrition most informative and while not idealizing traditional societies, the author makes the case that there is, indeed, much we can learn from them.

---

### **Seth Kolloen says**

Extremely disappointing. There are a few interesting chapters, but I probably skimmed about 60% of the book. There is a lot of long-winded explanation of things that any high school student probably knows (languages are disappearing - people are fat - religious people sometimes go to war!) The last third especially just seems like Diamond spouting off about nutrition and education with very little tied back to the supposed theme of the book. Really felt like about a 60 page book that was just expanded to make it marketable. Honestly, I feel like I was ripped off.

---