



January, 2014

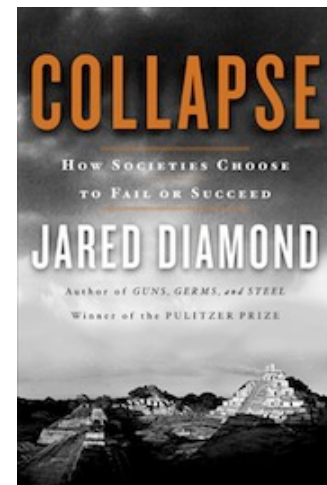
Volume 14, No. 1

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jared Diamond. Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.** NY: Penguin Group 2005. 575 pp. Further readings 32 pp. \$17.00

Jared Diamond brings us a cogently argued discussion of numerous societies over several thousand years that collapsed, and of a very few that have survived. He has gathered a convincing mass of evidence that the fall of most societies is due to destruction of their environments, which he calls “ecological suicide.”

...The processes through which past societies have undermined themselves by damaging their environments fall into eight categories, whose relative importance differs from case to case: deforestation and habitat destruction, soil problems (erosion, desalinization, and soil fertility losses), water management problems, overhunting, overfishing, effects of introduced species on native species, human population growth, and increased per-capita impact of people. (p. 6)



Diamond points out that modern society considers itself immune to collapse because of modern technology, but that in fact, we are simply destroying our planet on a much vaster scale and at a much faster rate than ever before. Our much larger population and interdependence upon conditions in distant locations means that environmental collapses in distant places puts us at greater risk than ever before.

One of the principal problems is our focus on immediate profits from extraction of resources while minimizing costs – including the expenses for disposing of waste byproducts in safe manners and in avoidance of pollution.

...Successful businesses differentiate between those expenses necessary to stay in business and those more pensively characterized as ‘moral obligations.’ Difficulties or reluctance to understand and accept this distinction underscores much of the tension between advocates of broadly mandated environmental programs and the business community... (p. 37)

When the mine owner can't or won't pay, taxpayers don't want to step in and pay billions of dollars of cleanup costs either. Instead, taxpayers feel that the problem has existed for a long time, out of sight and out of their backyards, so it must be tolerable; most taxpayers balk at spending money if

there isn't an immediate crisis; and not enough taxpayers complain about toxic wastes or support high taxes. In this sense, the American public is as responsible for inaction as are miners and the government; we the public bear the ultimate responsibility. Only when the public pressures its politicians into passing laws demanding different behaviors from mining companies will the companies behave differently; otherwise, the companies would be operating as charities and would be violating their responsibility to their shareholders... (p. 38)

The bottom line is the attitude of "ISEP" – It's somebody else's problem.

Diamond details the problems of ecological collapse that led to the downfall of almost every society on our planet in recorded history, including Easter Island, Pitcairn (famous from *Mutiny on the Bounty*) and Henderson Islands, the Anasazi of New Mexico, the Mayans of Mexico, the Vikings, the Norse in Greenland, Australia, and many others. All fell due to having ignored the limitations of carrying capacity of their environments in the face of overpopulation.

The saddest aspect of all of these societal ecological suicides is that modern man has not heeded the lessons of the past. We are repeating the very same mistakes but on such a vast, planetary scale, that we are well on our way to causing the sixth great extinction of our planet. We have no way of knowing what the tipping point of no return might be. Hopefully, we are not already too late to halt and reverse our path to global self-destruction. (See the editorial in this issue for more on this.)

The brilliance of Diamond's book is that he points out that there are alternatives to what we are doing, with clear examples from past and present societies for sustainable ways to live on this earth.

One of these is the New Guinea highlands, "...and that agriculture has been going on there for about 7,000 years – one of the world's longest-running experiments in sustainable food production." Here, small, family landholdings worked by within close-knit communities are run with careful consideration of the needs of the land and its plants and animals, as well as of the needs of the people. There is a firmly entrenched bottom-up approach that prevails on this island, with local citizens making the decisions that are needed to resolve communal problems. A very important contribution to their success is their self control of population to avoid exceeding the carrying capacity of the land.

Similar success is evident on Tikopia, a small island in the Southwest Pacific Ocean. Again, there is a bottom-up structure to their society, with 3,000 years of survival of their culture.

My own impression is that much of the success of these small societies may be attributed to the social rule that people do well within a limit of 150 members in their community (or working group). Within this limit, everyone knows everyone else personally and relationships are based on frequent interactions between all members of the group. There isn't the impersonality of larger societies that allows and encourages greedy and/or power-hungry individuals or groups (be they businesses, corporations or politicians) to build their power and control over other members of the population – for their own benefits, at the expense of the rest of the population.

But Diamond does not stop here. He points out that Japan is another example of several hundreds of years of balancing population growth with careful stewardship of their cultivated land and forests. Diamond's book was written several years prior to the Fukushima disaster that continues to deteriorate and to threaten the health of the Japanese people, their land, and probably – to an unknown extent – of the nearby ocean waters and of many others in the Northern Hemisphere. So perhaps my conjecture about the long-term viability of a society depending on the presence of smaller communities still holds.

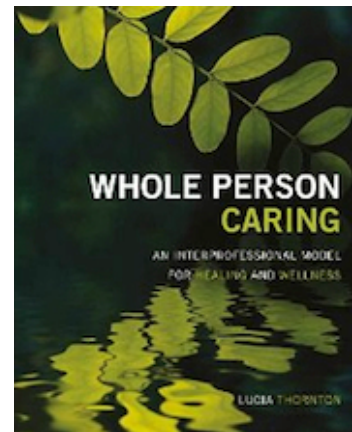
Diamond makes many helpful suggestions for how to deal with the crisis of our impending sixth global extinction.

This is a book most highly recommended for anyone concerned with bettering our world.

Review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

**Lucia Thornton. *Whole Person Caring: An Interprofessional Model for Healing and Wellness.*** Indianapolis, IN: Sigma Theta Tau International 2013. 263 pp. \$44.96. Generous, helpful references after each chapter.

Whole Person Caring by Lucia Thornton is an outstanding resource for anyone interested in integrative holistic care. Here you will find conceptual models; suggestions for harmonizing conventional and complementary/ alternative therapy approaches; examples of ways in which whole person care is beneficial to staff, patients, management and institutions as a whole; research evidence and cost effectiveness of benefits; and, most importantly, considerations of ways in which these approaches humanize health care.



I have known Lucia for over a decade through extensive conversations at meetings of various inter-professional wholistic organizations. Lucia Thornton is a wise teacher with a very broad range of nursing, teaching and administrative experience, including having been President of the American Holistic Nursing Association.

This carefully structured and well organized book you will find discussions on:

- Problems in western conventional health care. The US now has one of the worst medical care systems in the world, despite having the highest healthcare costs in the world.
- Returning 'Health' to Health Care
- Contributions of holistic healing to health care
- Developing interprofessional collaborations to enhance health care

I particularly like the discussions on Whole-Person Caring, starting with the following focus:

The model of whole-person caring (WPC) is a framework designed to guide individuals and organizations toward health and wellness. The model operationalizes concepts inherent to healing at both a personal and organizational level. It is an interdisciplinary and holistic model that is derived from theorists in the fields of nursing, physics, and systems theory. It was originally developed to assist health care organizations in creating a healing and nurturing environment for consumers and health care personnel. However, it is equally useful for business, educational, community, and governmental organizations. (p. 39)

Western medicine has subdivided the care of people into fragments that are convenient for conventional caregivers but awkward for careseekers. Each person has a body, emotions, mind, relationships (with other people and the environment) and spirit. When there is a dysfunction in one aspect of a person, all the others are affected. To address only the body or only the mind and emotions – as is commonly done in our current healthcare system – is to ignore the wholeness of the person.

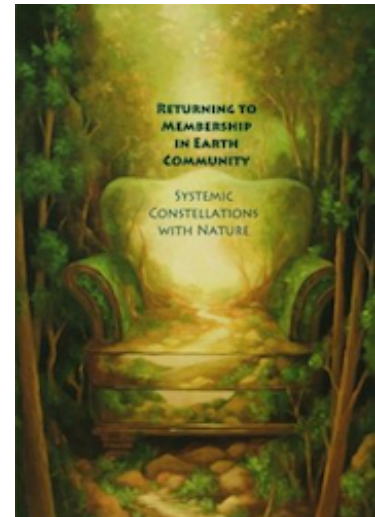
Lucia Thornton discusses many ways in which inter-professional partnering and multi-disciplinary interventions can better serve each person's individual needs. One of the primary ones is identifying and meeting the needs of the caregiver – that are also important elements in developing a holistic healthcare system.

If you are a caregiver of any profession or involved in management of a healthcare facility and concerned about returning to a more holistic model, this is an important book to read.

Review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

**Francesca Mason Boring, Kenneth Edwin Sloan (Eds).**  
***Returning to Membership in Earth Community: Systemic Constellations with Nature.*** Pagosa Springs, CO: Stream of Experience Productions 2013. 196 pp. \$19.95

Francesca Mason Boring widens the field of focus of family constellation work to include invitations for healing of nature – the environment in which we live and within which we are part of a much vaster, extended family than most of us in western society acknowledge. The book includes writings from elders in constellation work; explorations of workers in the field; and opportunities for applying this expanded approach.



I find the explorations section most fascinating. The abstract to the chapter of Berchtold Wasser, a forrester, summarizes this nicely:

In nature constellations, we can see the unfolding of living systems. That which flows between people, animals, plants and landscapes becomes visible. We can see where this flow is interrupted and how to get it going again. Because of this, the method is perfectly suited for diagnosis and discovery of possible solutions concerning questions about ecosystems, as well as everywhere that humans are influencing their environment and it is influencing them. (p. 37)

Several chapters explore working with animals. John Cheney explores constellations clarifying how to harmonize the five elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Zita Cox, a psychotherapist and constellation facilitator, has extended her work to include eco-psychology. Working on the relationships of people with the dying rainforest, she found:

What the rainforest was requesting was not action but reverence as all the representatives in the constellation came and knelt around the Rainforest in silence, respect and grief, it slowly died. Most unexpectedly, life immediately began to shoot or be re-born from the dying Forest. (p. 58)

For anyone interested in Family Constellation Therapy and/or who is concerned about the survival of life as we know it today on this planet, this book is a MUST READ.

Review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

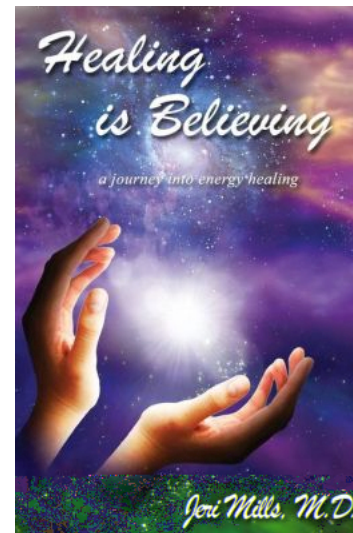
**Jeri Mills, MD. *Healing is Believing: a journey into energy healing.*** White Sage Press 2013. 207 pp. \$15.95

Jeri Mills is an integrative medicine physician, veterinarian, Reiki Master Teacher, intuitive healer, writer and storyteller. In this lovely book she shares the integration of all of these skills and gifts into her life.

This is an easy and engaging read, told through anecdotes about Jeri's opening to ever deeper awarenesses of her intuitive awarenesses and healing abilities – with animals and people, through bioenergy interactions in person and from a distance.

If you ever wanted to learn about how medical intuition and healing can be helpful, and how a person can open into connecting with these gifts and developing them, this is definitely a book for you.

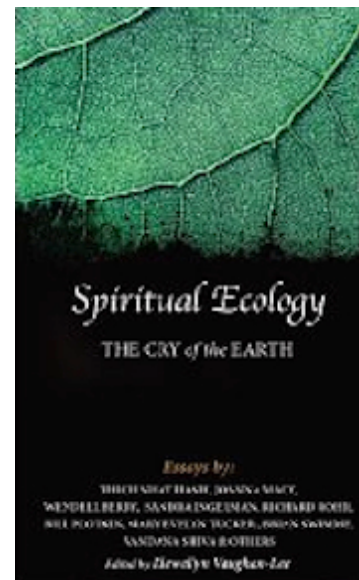
Review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC



**Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth.*** Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center 2013. 264 pp. \$15.95

This is an excellent collection of perspectives on connecting deeply with our planet, as introduced by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee:

Each of these chapters can be seen as a different way of describing a journey one we must make now, from our soulless, materialistic wasteland to a land rich in meaning and sacred purpose, which knows the name and place of all of its myriad inhabitants. On this side, where our world stands now, we each live our separate lives, isolated within our individual, anxious self. On the other side, we feel the patterns of interrelationship that support and nourish us, and can commune together as a single living community; we feel the mystery and magic of a world full of sacred meaning and purpose. It is only when we stand on this other shore that we can hope to heal our world, to help it to become free of this nightmare of materialism that is destroying its fragile and magical beauty.  
(p. iii)



The marvelous spectrum of contributors include a Native American Faithkeeper, advocates for earth-based spirituality, a Zen Buddhist monk and a Zen teacher, a tribal chief from Uganda, scientists who are Buddhists, western cosmologists, a Native American activist, an eco-philosopher and activist, and many more.

Thomas Berry on our disconnection:

We are talking only to ourselves. We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation. By breaking that conversation we have

shattered the universe. All the disasters that are happening now are a consequence of that spiritual “autism.” (p. 44)

Thich Nhat Hanh, recommending mindfulness meditation:

All of us know that our beautiful green planet is in danger. Our way of walking on the Earth has a great influence on animals and plants. Yet we act as if our daily lives have nothing to do with the condition of the world. We are like sleepwalkers, not knowing what we are doing or where we are heading. Whether we can wake up or not depends on whether we can walk mindfully on our own, depends on our mindful steps. We have to hear the bells of mindfulness that are sounding all across our planet. We have to start learning how to live in a way that a future will be possible for our children and our grandchildren.

Joanna Macy, advocating for developing a moral ecology:

It is happening because of three converging developments. First, the conventional small self, or ego-self, is being psychologically and spiritually challenged by confrontation with dangers of mass annihilation. The second force working to dismantle the ego-self is a way of seeing that has arisen out of science. From living systems theory and systems cybernetics emerges a process view of the self as inseparable from the web of relationships that sustain it. The third force is the resurgence in our time of non-dualistic spiritualities. (p. 148)

The self is a metaphor. We can choose to limit it to our skin, our person, our family, our organization, or our species. We can select its boundaries in objective reality. As Bateson explains, our self-reflective purposive consciousness illuminates but a small arc in the currents and loops of knowing that interweave us. It is just as plausible to conceive of mind as coexistent with these larger circuits, with the entire, “pattern that connects.” (p. 152)

This is a book for a slow, thoughtful read and re-read. Excellent for a table by your bed, where you can dip into it and then lie back and ponder.

Review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

#### TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically as an open access journal, available at no charge. You may choose to print your downloaded copy of this article or any other article for relaxed reading.

We encourage you to share this article with friends and colleagues.

**The International Journal of Healing and Caring – On Line**

**P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099**

**Phone (609) 714-1885 Fax (519) 265-0746**

**Email: [center@ijhc.org](mailto:center@ijhc.org) Website: <http://www.ijhc.org>**

**Copyright © 2013 IJHC. All rights reserved.**

**DISCLAIMER: <http://www.wholistichealingresearch.com/disclaimer.html>**