



Taking Responsibility for the Life of Complex Human Ecosystems: *Deep Accountability*

Gary Gunderson & James Cochrane
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The cover explicitly acknowledges how much we have learned from so many LCLI Fellows over time, and on the inside we name all from those years who have taught us.

Below are synopses of the chapters of the book, with titles and sections that make up the Table of Contents.

Ch. 1: Now

Troubled about the state of our societies and world, wondering if our best efforts will be enough or in time, and dissatisfied by dominant ways of thinking and acting, we seek new ways of being *deeply accountable*—for one’s own life and for the life of all. ‘Deep accountability’ is about how we respond to threats, invest our energies, and exercise our responsibilities, to give our children and grandchildren a chance for thriving.

Ch. 2: Capacities

[‘What Hath God Wrought?’ / Intentionality Matters / The Moral of the Story / Burden and Gift / Beyond Self-Interest]

However affected by hereditary or social dynamics, we can and do imagine new possibilities that do not exist and bring them into being—material things, social relationships, ways of working and thinking. We are, in short, *causal agents* in the world through our ‘creative freedom,’ the capacities we possess that enable us actively and intentionally to transform both nature and ourselves. That also makes us *morally responsible* for what we intend, for the grounds upon which we choose how to orient ourselves towards others and in the world, for the ends we choose to pursue.

Ch. 3: Joy

[No Use Without Joy / Joy as Resistance / The Radical Nature of Joy]

We have spent lives in movements responding to apartheid, disparity, other social challenges, and now climate change. We durably sustain our creative efforts if we find joy in them—not with eyes closed, but wide open in the middle of what matters most. Radical joy springs from what is possible for us as human beings even in the midst of trauma and evil. Neither frivolity, escapism, thoughtlessness, insensitivity, nor foolishness, it is a vitality, a flow of energy and spirit, that refuses death and celebrates life. Here laughter is resistance, an act of rebellion in the face of atrocity, an assertion of what it means to be human.

Ch. 4: Storm

[Medical Nemesis / Altruistic Nemesis / Science Bent / Medicine is Not Just Medical / Global Nemesis / The Breaking Storm]

Structures designed for social good are all too often themselves bound up in the patterns of privilege that make change difficult, complicity hard to avoid. Thus comes *Nemesis*, the highly inconvenient Greek goddess who wreaks justice on the proud, the privileged, on those who seek their own self-interest at the cost of others, including future generations. A self-reinforcing weave of privileges, some of race and class, others of language, legal status, gender, and the long momentum of accumulated wealth and educational advantages, attracts the judgement of *Nemesis*.

Ch. 5: Value

[Who Creates Value? / Value is Power / Thinking Differently / Absurd Prices, Lost Value / Disrespect—and Dignity / Hidden in Plain Sight: Working with a Different Story / Organizing Around True Value]

Nothing is more dispiriting and paralyzing than the monetization of nearly every aspect of human relationships, or the assigning of a cost, resting on price, that gives value to some things, some people, and not others. Interested on the value of what brings life, we follow Mariana Mazzucato for whom this “is not an abstract debate but one with far-reaching consequences—social and political as well as economic—for everyone.” Price, determined by markets, hides the asymmetries of power—who makes decisions, how they are made, and to what ends. Worse, it hides “what should be alive, public and actively contested,” and thus, feeds a rising and widespread anger against those who sit in the commanding heights of polity and economy. A better ‘story’ places value before price, value creation above value extraction, a deeply collective process that includes our relationship to nature, to the earth that sustains and the creatures who share the ecosystem we inhabit upon which we depend.

Ch. 6: Involution

[On Not Dumbing Down Life / How Life Works / The Intimacy of Strangers, & Those Closest to Us / Not Afraid of Ourselves / Starting with the Whole]

The metaphor of mycelium gives rise to the concept of involution (Mervin Sheldrake) — the constant forming and re-forming of relationships that enable cooperation beneficial to all, in which none are able to hijack them for their own exclusive benefit. A similar view comes from neuroscientist Paul Laurienti on the dynamic patterns of the complex brain in the relationships and interactions of the integrated whole. Applied socially, these metaphors prompt us to rethink how we move over, around, through multi-leveled relationships, across languages and other boundaries, to make sense of the world as a whole. Refusing to be trapped in actuality, involution means being oriented purposively, with meaning, care, and conviction, towards what is possible, to the way things can be.

Ch. 7: Walking

[‘Meshworks’: Lines, Knots, Traces & Leaks / An Intellectual Meshwork / ‘Affective Entanglement’ / Ways of Walking / Complex Human Ecosystems / Springing Toward Each Other]

And so we resist thinking of human relations and social structures as computer networks or manipulable mathematical models. Living systems find vitality in a complex relational mesh. Here we turn to anthropologist Tim Ingold’s notion of ‘meshworks’—which extends the notion of networks to emphasize “knots or bundles of relations, spreading in multiple directions, able to entangle each other, some stronger or weaker, with more or less presence, creating thicker or thinner but ever-changing traces.” Importantly, this includes ‘affective entanglement,’ the emotional and psychological history of relations, always impacted by differential or asymmetric relations of power. So it is that we might find our way across difficult terrain.

Ch. 8: Lightness

[‘Theatre of the Soul’ / Moving Together / Good Thinking]

Helping ignite our passion to live and act towards what amounts to the highest good of which we are capable is our experience of beauty, of awe and wonder, a fullness of being that inspires us and stirs us. The bond between curiosity and responsibility, it is respect for the profound unity and coherence of nature itself to which we belong with our respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. It’s what lifts and lightens our making and unmaking as generative rather than destructive, a journey happening wherever there is a story of courage, of agency and hope, of conviction in favour of that which gives life in the midst of all that threatens to take it. Resting on what others have achieved, our struggle not exactly theirs, we, like them, can learn to act as best we can, to risk as wisely and boldly as they did, holding to our humanity and treasuring our capacities of creative freedom—bearers of a life of deep accountability.

Bibliography