

Summery of collapse

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



College: Book Review of " Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed" by Jared Diamond Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or succeed is a book written by Jared Diamond, physiology and geography professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. The book mainly deals with environmental factors that make societies collapse, but also incorporates the contribution of trade partners, hostile neighbors, and climate change. A major focus of the book is the response of past societies to these threats, and the suitability of these responses. Diamond analyzes several ancient societies that enjoyed a period of success and prosperity before collapsing as a result of various environmental pressures. These include the Maya, the East Islanders, and the Greenland Norse colony. He strikes parallels between the situation of these ancient societies and that of several modern nations, notably Haiti, Rwanda, and Australia. In each of the ancient instances of societal collapse, the environmental played a crucial role. Population pressure combined with resource depletion and the destruction of habitats in a variety of different circumstances challenged these societies beyond their ability to respond. Consequently, they disintegrated. Diamond singles out human choice as the principal determinant between prosperity and ruin. He describes how the Polynesians in Tikopia and the Inuit in the arctic succeeded at created lifestyles that turned out to be sustainable indefinitely. In addition, he contrasts the economic and political success of the Dominican Republic to Haiti's failure in these areas. In many instances, it was the decisions and choices of able leaders that created ecological stability, whereas, in others, it was the advantage of having favorable weather or topography. He analyzes the reasons why societies tend to make disastrous

decisions that bring about their own collapse. Firstly, society may fail to detect problems which could pose a serious threat to its survival. Secondly, leaders or the society at large may take responsive action, which may result in unanticipated consequences. Thirdly, society may detect problems but choose to ignore them on a rational basis. Diamond lists five factors that may lead to collapse. These are environmental problems, hostile neighbors, and climate change, collapse of key trading partners, and failure or inability to adapt environmental pressures. Diamond also identifies 12 environmental challenges facing humans today. The first eight of these factors played key roles in bringing about the collapse of many past societies. These factors are soil problems such as erosion, deforestation and the destruction of habitats, problems in water management, overfishing, overhunting, effects of introduced species on native species, increased per capita income of individuals, and overpopulation. He also identifies four emergent factors that play a significant part in the weakening and collapse of modern generations. These are the accumulation of toxins in the environment, energy shortages, climate change, and full human utilization of the world's productive capacity. In addition, Diamond analyzes the role played by cultural factors in contributing to societal collapse. He gives an example of the Greenland Norse to whom eating of fish was a cultural taboo. As a result, they were left with limited food options when their traditional food sources began to decline, despite fish being in plentiful supply in their environment. Critical analysis of all the factors identified by Diamond reveals that the root problem that brings about collapse is overpopulation. Rise in population beyond the environment's carrying capacity puts excessive pressure on the

available resources. Competition for scarce resources eventually causes a society to descend into chaos. The only factor that has no relation to overpopulation is the negative effect of introducing foreign species to a certain environment. Diamond also asserts that environmental damage is not the only prime factor that leads to collapse. He states that the Soviet Union serves as a good modern example of a nation that collapsed due to negative political and economic factors in contrast to environmental factors. Carthage's destruction by Rome in 146 BC serves as his ancient example. Through a series of parallel comparisons, Diamond argues that the modern industrial society is creating environmental problems quite similar to those that brought about the failure of many ancient societies. However, his case is not strong enough to convince the reader of an imminent global industrial collapse. For instance, he fails to mention the imminent peak in global oil production. Very soon global oil production capacity is going to begin a steady decline, despite perennial growth of the world's essential energy needs. The oil peak is not only going to trigger devastating resource wars, but also a global economic collapse if nations do not take fundamental measures to diversify reliance on various sources of energy. Another contentious issue with Diamond's argument is his selection of societies that have collapsed in the past. He analyzes obscure civilizations such as Cahokia who wrote very little and, therefore, we know very little about them. All in all, Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed is a well-written book which brings further attention to the imminent economic collapse that will occur in the coming years if world leaders do not foster international cooperation in a bid to respond to various serious environmental challenges.

Jared Diamond argues his points by providing credible evidence in most cases. In those few cases that his evidence is not verifiable, he argues out his points rationally and conclusively. Works Cited Diamond, Jared. "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed". New York: Penguin Group, 2011.