

Collapse of Society

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Jared Diamond's *Collapse* examines the causes of societal failures due to issues within the surrounding environment, climate change, and negative interactions with other societies (such as war, and economic and trade failures). He also identifies many of these problems as ones that continue to affect mankind, and threaten our future as a species. A lot of them are related to how we affect our environment through obtaining resources (such as deforestation, overfishing, and overhunting), as well as overpopulation.

Diamond uses many examples of failures to reinforce his points of what occurs to leave a society in ruins. I found reading about Easter Island very interesting, as the giant stone heads (Moai), as well as the people who lived there and created them (the Rapa Nui) had always seemed mysterious to me. This example was different from the others, because of its isolation; yet the same points he makes remain true.

The 'main' causation of this Polynesian people's collapse is environmental; they run out of trees due to deforestation. But like his other examples, the causation is more complicated, having to do with an intertwining of the ecology surrounding a society. Overpopulation leads to overuse and destruction of resources. Timber was used to transport the Moai heads, which was a significant feature of their culture. Environmental mismanagement led to failed agriculture. Lack of resources incite hostility, and is hypothesized to have led to a civil war on the island.

After Diamond has examined past as well as more modern societal failures, he looks at why they are allowed to happen. Surprisingly, he offers that even when an impending problem is sensed, many societies do not respond to them, mostly due to difficulties communicating and making decisions as a group. He related this to our own recent pressing topics (which are now highly globalized), such as global warming, environmental toxins, and decreasing energy resources. We know that these issues are affecting us, and will eventually become serious problems if we do not handle them correctly. The question is whether or not we will overcome them, or fail to do so, and collapse.