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**ESSAY  
TO THE TOPIC**

**Collapse, Decline, and Poverty**

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## **I. Introduction**

The issue of collapse, decline, and poverty has been a recurring theme throughout human history, affecting societies and civilizations across the globe. Whether due to economic, environmental, or political factors, the collapse of societies and the decline into poverty have had far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the individuals living within those societies but also the broader global community.

In this essay, I will explore the causes and consequences of collapse, decline, and poverty, and examine how different factors contribute to these outcomes. Furthermore I will explore the experiences of different societies and civilizations, past and present, and analyze the patterns that emerge from their histories.

By understanding the underlying factors that contribute to societal collapse and poverty, one can begin to develop strategies to prevent or mitigate these outcomes, and work towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

## **II. Background Information**

*Poor economics. A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011):*

"Poor Economics. A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty" is a book that addresses the question of how poverty can best be fought. The authors analyse the various strategies that have been used over the years to reduce poverty in developing countries and find that many of these strategies have not been as successful as hoped.

The argumentation is that poverty reduction cannot simply be achieved through a "one-size-fits-all" solution, but that there are specific strategies that are best suited for different types of poverty and for different population groups. Banerjee and Duflo also note that poverty reduction is not just a matter of providing financial resources, but also depends on incentivising and engaging local communities in poverty reduction efforts. The book is based on the research findings and experience of the authors, who have been working on poverty reduction for years. They offer numerous case studies and examples from different parts of the world to support their arguments.

Overall, Poor Economics is a profound and critical examination of the problems of global poverty and a call for a radical rethinking of the way we approach poverty reduction.

*The Seneca effect. Why growth is slow but collapse is rapid (Bardi, 2017):*

"The Seneca Effect" by Ugo Bardi explores the concept of collapse in natural and social systems. The book is named after the Seneca Cliff, a phenomenon in which natural systems experience a slow growth period followed by a rapid collapse. For this scenario Bardi argues that this pattern is also evident in human societies and economies, and that many civilizations throughout history have experienced a similar collapse. For this Bardi provides examples of how different civilizations, such as the Roman Empire, experienced slow growth followed by a rapid collapse. He also analyzes the contemporary world and argues that our current reliance on non-

renewable resources and the degradation of the environment could lead to a similar collapse. To underpin this Bardi suggests that our modern society's reliance on economic growth and its inability to address environmental issues could lead to a catastrophic collapse.

Overall, "The Seneca Effect" offers a warning about the dangers of exponential growth and the need for sustainable practices. It provides insights into the mechanisms of collapse and suggests ways to avoid it by adopting more sustainable and resilient systems.

*The bottom billion. Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it (Collier, 2007):*

"The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It" by Paul Collier explores the reasons why the world's poorest countries remain in poverty and instability and what can be done to change this.

Collier argues that there is a group of about one billion people in the world's poorest countries, which he calls the "bottom trillion". This group of countries is characterised by persistent poverty, political instability and lack of economic development.

The author examines the causes of these problems and shows that most of these countries are stuck in a trap from which they cannot escape. There is a combination of factors such as poor governance, corruption, lack of investment, poor infrastructure and low productivity that result in these countries being trapped in a vicious cycle. Collier also suggests various measures to get these countries out of their situation. He argues that a combination of political, economic and social measures is needed to break the trap of poverty. These include investing in infrastructure, incentivising foreign investment, improving governance and promoting education and health care.

In summary, The Bottom Billion provides a comprehensive and well-researched analysis of the challenges facing the world's poorest countries, as well as practical suggestions on how these countries can get out of their difficult situation.

*How societies choose to fail or succeed (Diamond, 2005):*

In "Collapse", Jared Diamond explores the collapse of societies throughout history, from the collapse of the Easter Island civilization to the collapse of modern-day Rwanda. Diamond argues that societal collapse is often the result of a combination of environmental problems, such as deforestation and climate change, and societal problems, such as political instability and resource depletion. The book highlights the importance of recognizing the interdependence between human societies and their natural environments. Diamond argues that societies that have successfully avoided collapse have done so by recognizing and adapting to their environmental challenges, and by developing social and political systems that promote long-term sustainability.

In conclusion, "Collapse" serves as a cautionary tale for modern societies, urging us to take action to address the environmental and social challenges we face in order to avoid a similar fate.

*Economic gangsters. Corruption, violence, and the poverty of nations (Fisman & Miguel, 2010):*

"Economic Gangsters: Corruption, Violence, and the Poverty of Nations" by Raymond Fisman and Edward Miguel examine the impact of corruption and violence on the economic development of countries.

The authors argue that corruption and violence have a direct impact on economic development, especially in poorer countries. They show that corruption not only causes funds to disappear from the public purse, but can also lead to inefficient decision-making and poor governance. Violence, on the other hand, can limit economic activity, hinder investment and discourage companies from investing in countries where violence is commonplace. Fisman and Miguel examine several case studies from different countries to support their arguments. They show how corruption and violence contribute to prolonging poverty and inhibiting economic development. However, they also argue that there are ways to fight corruption and violence and promote economic development.

To summarise, "Economic Gangsters" provides a compelling and informative examination of the impact of corruption and violence on the economic development of countries. It also shows how these problems can be tackled to create long-term growth opportunities.

*Six sources of collapse. A mathematician's perspective on how things can fall apart in the blink of an eye (Hadlock, 2012):*

In "Six Sources of Collapse: A Mathematician's Perspective on How Things Can Fall Apart in the Blink of an Eye," Charles R. Hadlock examines six different mathematical models that can help explain the collapse of systems and organisations.

Hadlock argues that any system - whether it is a business, a government or a society - is prone to collapse when certain conditions are met. These conditions can be described by mathematical models, which Hadlock identifies as the "six sources of collapse". The six sources are: Transfer of Energy, Conflicts, Reinforcement of Feedback Loops, Backlash, Slowdown of Feedback Loops and Collisions. For each of these sources, Hadlock provides examples to illustrate how they can help explain system breakdown.

With his book, Hadlock offers a unique perspective on the causes of systems and organisational breakdown and shows how mathematical models can help to understand and prevent these phenomena.

*The poverty of nations (Khusro, 1999):*

In "The Poverty of Nations," Ali Mohammed Khusro examines the causes of poverty in developing countries, arguing that it is the result of a complex set of factors such as imperialism, corruption, and a lack of investment in education, health, and infrastructure. He emphasizes that poverty cannot be alleviated through a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead requires a tailored solution that takes into account the unique economic, social, and political conditions of each country. Khusro also discusses the negative effects of globalization on poverty, arguing that the current global economic system exacerbates inequality and perpetuates poverty in developing countries. He suggests that developed countries should take responsibility for their role in

perpetuating global poverty and work towards more equitable trade policies and investments in developing countries.

Overall, Khusro's book highlights the complex nature of poverty and emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing it.

*Falter: Has the human game begun to play itself out? (McKibben, 2019):*

"Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?" is a book by environmental activist Bill McKibben that addresses the challenges and threats that await our planet and society in the future.

McKibben argues that humanity is at a crossroads and that we need to decide whether we want to continue as we are or whether we need to change our lifestyles to create a sustainable future. He describes the impact of climate change, population growth and technological developments and shows how these factors will interact and influence the future of our world.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, McKibben looks at climate change and the impact it is having on our planet. The second part is about technological developments and whether they can help us meet the challenges of the future. In the third part, McKibben examines the economic and political forces that can hinder or promote change.

"Falter" is a call to action and to take responsibility. McKibben shows that the challenges we face are not insurmountable and that there are courses of action that can help us create a sustainable future. He challenges readers to commit to change and create a better future for all.

*The rise and decline of nations (Olson, 1982):*

In "The Rise and Decline of Nations", economist Mancur Olson describes how political institutions can influence the prosperity and economic development of nations.

Olson argues that political institutions and interest groups often try to gain advantages for themselves instead of looking at the common good and the long-term welfare of society. This leads to a distortion of markets and an inefficient allocation of resources. He also describes how the emergence of interest groups and the political influence of elites can lead to economic reforms being made more difficult and the economy stagnating. Olson also emphasizes the importance of institutional reform to promote prosperity and growth. The book is divided into three parts. The first part looks at the reasons why nations prosper and decline. The second part examines how interest groups and political institutions influence economic development. The third part deals with the role of reforms and the importance of institutional change for economic growth.

Olson's work is considered an influential contribution to political economy and institutional development. His analysis of the role of interest groups and political institutions has helped to deepen the understanding of how markets and political systems emerge and function.

*The five stages of collapse (Orlov, 2013):*

"The Five Stages of Collapse" by Dmitry Orlov is a book that deals with the possible stages of collapse of societies. Orlov argues that there are many examples in history of the collapse of societies and that this process takes place in five stages.

The first stage is economic collapse, where the financial system collapses and the economy stagnates. The second stage is political collapse, where the political system becomes unstable, possibly leading to civil war or revolution. The third stage is social collapse, where society falls apart and social structures break down. The fourth stage is cultural breakdown, where the common values and traditions of society disappear. The fifth and final stage is ecological collapse, where the environment is destroyed and natural disasters occur.

Orlov examines these stages of collapse using historical examples and compares them with current developments in the world. He argues that the collapse of societies is not inevitable, but that it is necessary to prepare for possible risks and challenges in order to avoid the worst.

The book is a warning and a call to action to prevent the imminent collapse of societies. It shows how important it is to prepare for change in order to create a sustainable future.

*The rise and fall of nations. Forces of change in the post-crisis world (Sharma, 2016):*

"The Rise and Fall of Nations" by Ruchir Sharma is a book that looks at the forces of change in the global economy after the 2008 financial crisis. Sharma is a renowned economic analyst and investment strategist known for his predictions and assessments.

In his book, Sharma argues that the world economy is in a period of transformation, influenced by profound changes in the political landscape, demographics, technology and globalisation. He examines these forces and analyses how they affect economic growth and opportunities for prosperity. Sharma also shows that there are certain factors that can help or hinder economic growth, such as sound infrastructure, the ability to innovate and an open political system. He also looks at how political developments, such as the rise of populism, can affect the economy.

The book is divided into three parts: Part One looks at the forces of change in the global economy, Part Two describes the factors that influence the growth and decline of nations, and Part Three examines the future of the global economy.

Sharma's book offers a broad overview of the factors that influence economic growth and provides insights and suggestions for investors, entrepreneurs and policy makers.

*Why did the Soviet Union collapse? Understanding Historical Change (Strayer, 1998):*

In "Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change", Robert Strayer examines the complex historical factors that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Strayer argues that the collapse was the result of a combination of long-term structural problems within the Soviet system, as well as short-term political and economic crises. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the Soviet Union, from its origins in the early 20th century to its collapse in the late 20th century. Strayer examines key events and developments, such as the Russian Revolution, World War II, and the Cold War, as well as important economic and

social trends, such as the rise of the command economy and the stagnation of the Soviet system in the 1970s and 1980s. One of Strayer's central arguments is that the Soviet Union was fundamentally unstable and unsustainable, due to a combination of factors such as centralized planning, political repression, and economic inefficiency. He also examines the role of key individuals, such as Mikhail Gorbachev, in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The book offers a nuanced and multifaceted analysis of the Soviet collapse, emphasizing the complex interplay of factors that contributed to this historic event. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the history of the Soviet Union and the factors that led to its collapse.

### *The collapse of complex societies (Tainter, 1988):*

In "The Collapse of Complex Societies," Joseph Tainter examines the collapse of ancient civilizations and proposes a general theory of societal collapse.

Regarding this, Tainter argues that complex societies, which are characterized by centralized governance, social stratification, and specialized economic roles, inevitably reach a point of diminishing returns in terms of the benefits they provide to their citizens. As societies become more complex, they require more resources and energy to maintain their structures, leading to increasing costs and declining returns. Tainter argues that societies respond to this situation by increasing their complexity even further, which leads to even greater resource depletion and societal stress.

Ultimately, according to Tainter, this process of increasing complexity and diminishing returns leads to a point of collapse, where societies are no longer able to maintain their existing structures and systems. Tainter provides several case studies of collapsed societies, including the Roman Empire, the Mayan civilization, and the Chaco culture of the American Southwest, among others.

Tainter's book is a seminal work in the field of archaeology and anthropology, and has influenced thinking about societal collapse and resilience across a wide range of disciplines. While his theory has been subject to some criticism, it remains an important contribution to our understanding of the rise and fall of complex societies.

### **III. Conclusion**

From the ideas in these books we can draw some possible connections and conclusions.

First, it is important to recognise that the causes of poverty and collapse can lie in many different areas, including economics, politics, the environment and society. Many of the books presented focus on how corruption, violence, inefficiency and inequality can hinder economic growth and social development.

Some books (such as Collier's "The Bottom Billion" and Fisman & Miguel's "Economic Gangsters") emphasise that the combination of unstable political systems and a lack of economic diversification and integration into the global economy can be the cause of stagnation and poverty in countries and regions.

Other books (such as Tainter's "The Collapse of Complex Societies" and Hadlock's "Six Sources of Collapse") point out that the collapse of societies and states is often due to a combination of



environmental problems and social and political tensions that can intensify over time and eventually lead to collapse.

McKibben's "Falter" examines the impact of climate change on the global economy and society, while Sharma's "The Rise and Fall of Nations" explores the various forces that influence the stability of countries.

Olson's "The Rise and Decline of Nations" and Strayer's "Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse?" take a look at historical examples of state failure and analyse which factors contributed to the collapse of states and systems.

One possible conclusion from these books could be that poverty and collapse are often caused by a combination of political, economic and environmental factors, and that long-term solutions to prevent collapse and poverty require a comprehensive strategy that addresses these different factors. Another possible conclusion is that the global community needs to work more closely together to address the causes of poverty and collapse, and that closer integration of countries into the global economy and the promotion of economic growth and political stability can be an important factor in combating poverty and collapse.

#### **IV. Connecting Ideas**

##### **IV.I. Rodrik's Trilemma**

„Rodrik's trilemma“ is the idea that it is impossible to simultaneously achieve economic globalization, national sovereignty, and democratic politics. This trilemma suggests that a country can only have two of these three objectives at any given time, but not all three.

Each of these works examines in its own way various aspects of economic, social, and political development, and they all offer insights into the challenges faced by nations and societies trying to balance these three competing objectives.

For example, Banerjee and Duflo discuss various options for economic development in poorer countries. In this context, Rodrik's Trilemma might be relevant, as it points to the constraints that underlie the choices and options of governments in developing and emerging countries. In particular, the authors could argue that the trilemma constrains the policy choices that governments can make to develop their economies and fight poverty. For example, Banerjee and Duflo could discuss how the influence of global economic and financial institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, can limit the sovereignty of governments. They could also discuss how efforts to promote economic development can threaten democracy in many developing countries.

If we look at the concept of "Rodrik's Trilemma" regarding Diamond's "Collapse", one could argue that environmental problems, such as resource scarcity, limit the room for manoeuvre of governments in choosing between economic globalisation, political democracy and national sovereignty. In „Collapse“, Diamond describes how environmental problems have triggered the collapse of societies that have relied too heavily on a particular resource or economic system. For

example, he describes how the exploitation of resources such as land, water and energy without regard for their sustainability can cause societies to collapse. These problems can be exacerbated by political decisions when governments put the desires of business enterprises above the needs of the environment and the population. In this context, "Collapse" could serve as a warning that governments should also consider the environmental impacts of their decisions when making decisions about economic development and political democracy. If they do not, they could jeopardise the potential for economic and political stability in the long term. In summary, it could be argued that "Collapse" could serve as an example of how environmental problems can affect the economic and political stability of societies and how the concept of "Rodrik's Trilemma" can help governments make decisions that take into account both the environment and economic and political stability.

Looking at Rodrik's trilemma, Kushro could argue in "The Poverty of Nations" that most poor countries struggle to develop their economies and fight poverty because they have constraints in all three areas. For example, the authors could argue that because many poor countries have little sovereignty over their economic policies, they are dependent on foreign investment and trade agreements that take into account the interests of foreign companies and countries more than their own. At the same time, Kushro could argue that political instability and corruption hinder the implementation of effective poverty reduction programmes and threaten democracy in many poor countries. In this context, „The Poverty of Nations“ could serve as a reflection on how poor countries can overcome Rodrik's Trilemma. The author might suggest that poor countries should strengthen their sovereignty to make their economic policies and trade agreements more responsive to their own needs. He might also suggest that poor countries should strengthen their political institutions to implement effective poverty reduction programmes and protect democracy. In summary, it could be argued that „The Poverty of Nations“ could serve as an example of how governments of poor countries can make decisions to strengthen their sovereignty and develop their economies, politics and environments in a more sustainable way that reduces poverty in their countries.

Taking a look at Rodrik's trilemma, Olson's "The Rise and Decline of Nations" could be seen as a critique of the idea that political democracy is always the best path to economic development. Instead, he argues that economic growth and development are more likely to occur in nations that have strong and effective political institutions, regardless of whether they are democratic or authoritarian.

In the context of the "Rodrik's Trilemma" the book "The Rise and Fall of Nations" by Sharma could be relevant in terms of examining the role of globalization and economic integration in economic development. Sharma argues that economic growth is influenced by a wide range of factors, including demographics, politics, and culture. He also argues that globalization and economic integration can be both a blessing and a curse for developing nations. While these forces can provide access to markets, capital, and technology, they can also create vulnerabilities and exacerbate economic imbalances.

In the context of the "Rodrik's Trilemma," Sharma's work could be seen as a critique of the idea that economic globalization is always beneficial for developing nations. Instead, he argues that successful economic development often requires a delicate balance between integration and autonomy, and that developing nations must be strategic in how they engage with the global economy. Overall, "The Rise and Fall of Nations" could be seen as a nuanced exploration of the complex factors that contribute to economic growth and decline. By highlighting the risks and rewards of economic integration, Sharma's work suggests that nations must be thoughtful and deliberate in their economic policies if they hope to achieve sustainable growth and development. In short, all of these works offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by nations and societies as they strive to balance economic globalization, national sovereignty, and democratic politics, and they can all be connected to the concept of "Rodrik's Trilemma."

#### **IV.II. Bremmer's J-Curve**

Some of the works, such as Collier's "The Bottom Billion" and McKibben's "Falter", deal with the problem of poverty and how to combat it. Here it is important to understand that the eradication of poverty cannot be achieved simply by a linear increase in wealth, but that there can often be an initial increase in poverty before there is a decrease, which resembles the shape of a J-curve.

Other works such as Diamond's Collapse or Tainter's The Collapse of Complex Societies look at the collapse of societies and show that vulnerability to collapse is not necessarily related to a lack of resources or wealth. Rather, an abundance of resources and a rapid increase in wealth can cause a society to grow too fast and fail to adapt quickly enough, leading to a collapse that resembles the shape of a J-curve.

Overall, it can be said that Bremmer's J-curve can be useful as a concept to understand how a society responds to changes in wealth and changes in its political and social structure. Many of the works mentioned above show that these changes are not always linear and can often have unexpected consequences that resemble the shape of a J-curve.

#### **IV.III. Kuznet's Curve**

It is possible to apply the principle of the Kuznets curve to some of the works mentioned. The Kuznets curve refers to the relationship between economic growth and income inequality. According to this theory, inequality in a country initially increases with economic growth and then decreases when a certain stage of development is reached.

Paul Collier's book "The Bottom Billion" could be considered in this context. It looks at the economic difficulties faced by the world's poorest countries and argues that they are in a "trap". This could be interpreted as an indication of a particular phase in the Kuznets curve where income inequality in a society becomes more acute.

Jared Diamond's book Collapse examines the collapse of societies and civilisations. Here it could be argued that the concept of the Kuznets curve can be applied to the changes that can occur in a society when income inequality is left unchecked, leading to instability and collapse.

However, there are also works where the application of the Kuznets curve is difficult. For example, Banerjee and Duflo's book *Poor Economics* looks at how to make the fight against poverty more effective and examines different approaches and programmes. It is difficult to make a connection to the Kuznets Curve here, as the book does not deal directly with income inequality.

In summary, the application of the Kuznets Curve principle to these works may vary as they deal with different aspects of the economy and society. It depends on the specific subject matter of each book whether an application makes sense or not.

## **V. Own Opinion**

In my eyes, as well as in the eyes of many others, the world is facing a great challenge. From my point of view, the question is whether the most widespread capitalism is really still the right system. The world economy has indeed grown in recent years, but at what price? From today's perspective, it can be said that above all the environment has suffered. Climate catastrophes are increasing rapidly and the outlook looks anything but good. Accompanying climate catastrophes will inevitably have economic consequences that cannot be ignored, and by the time basic services are threatened, especially those of the current elites, it may already be too late. Political and economic instability will be the result. Humanity must act if we want to live on this planet in the future. In my opinion, the only solution to this, considering Roderick's trilemma, is to give up national sovereignty and install an intact world government that also has decision-making power for higher goals. As long as each country acts on its own, and there are no serious consequences for not meeting set climate targets, then we cannot expect countries pursuing their own economic interests to forgo economic growth just to meet their climate targets. Of course, it is questionable whether all countries would participate in a newly installed world government, let alone adhere to the targets it sets. One solution to this could be far-reaching sanctions that would force each country to give up national sovereignty for this purpose. These would be radical means, but in my eyes the only way to live together sustainably on this planet. Whether it is perhaps simply human nature that there is always someone who wants to be "higher, further, faster" than everyone else, I cannot answer. I have the uneasy feeling that we all only realise what the clock has struck when it is already too late.

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