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Collapse

Jared Diamond recounts, in his book Collapse, how civilizations across time have fallen, while also indirectly speculating on the fate of modern day societies. Diamond would agree with the quote from L.P. Hartley that “the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there” for the most part. He clearly states that people in the past have essentially been foreign because of the things they value socially and culturally. Easter Island, for example, focused all their time and resources to building these elaborate stone structures called moai, which sat on even bigger stone platforms called ahu and Mayan Kings wanted to impress their rivals with large scale temples, while societies today focus more of their efforts on prospering through tangible economic results. Although, Diamond agrees that the past was foreign, he still leaves open the question of whether these types of collapses could ever happen again. Despite all the obliviousness to problems by these societies, Diamond still makes the claim that modern society has the potential to fall just like the island civilizations for similar reasons. The Earth remains quite isolated. If the resources run out, which they eventually will, mankind will have no help, the same problem that killed off the natives of Easter Island. War over insignificant things can lead to lose of population and misuse of valuable resources like what happened to the Mayans when the kings and nobles started fighting each other for the remaining resources. All these things remain potential problems for human society.

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* Different social and cultural values
  + Easter Island spent all their time building statues
  + Polynesian Islands relied to heavily on trading with each other
  + Mayans also spent to much time with war and monuments due to kings and nobles rather than problem solving (pg 160)
  + Mayans also wanted to impress each other by building large scale temples
  + Mayan kings and Easter chiefs were “passive in the face of the real big threats to their societies” (177)
* American and present world values
  + Prospering economically
  + Spreading culturally
  + Exploring globally
* Yet modern day society could still fall just like these island cultures
  + Easter Island serves as a microcosm for the earth
    - Easter started as a “miniature paradise, free from the problems besetting much of the rest of the world.”(83) and still failed
    - If we get into difficulties there’s nobody close to us that could help pg 119
    - “If thousands of Easter Islanders with jus stone tools and their own muscle power sufficed to destroy their environment and thereby their society, how can billions of people with metal tools and machine power now fail to do worse?”(119)