



Historical Social Collapse

Several historical societies appear to have exhibited boom-bust population and resource trajectories culminating in their social collapse. This happened because they destroyed the resource base on which they depended. Optimal resource management institutions and technical innovation in the resource sector are commonly proposed solutions to their plight. We examine in simulations the effects that these forces might have on the collapse, assuming the best of all worlds in which foresight is infinite and innovation is immediate and limitless. The simulation results are gloomy. Unless the discount rate is low enough -- really low in current terms -- it collapses in almost all cases. Implications for what we do on Earth today are disconcerting. Dr. Rafael Reuveny discusses them and examines possibilities to avert a potential crisis for humanity.

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Rafael Reuveny is professor at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA. His research centers on the collapse of historical societies, migration associated with climate change, health impacts of climate migration, and causes of collective violence. He is author of many articles and books. He was programme chair of the meetings of the Global International Studies Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He won two teaching awards at Indiana University and is the co-recipient of the 2007 Award of Excellence in World Society Research, from the World Society Foundation, Zurich. Professor Reuveny is also an expert in the political economy of the Middle East.