

Book Review

The Decline and Fall of the Modern Civilization: Is the Collapse Inevitable?

By Mohammad Zohurul Islam. Edited by Mufakkharul Anam and Shah Abdul Halim, (Toronto: Institute of Islamic Thought, 2025), pp. xiv + 240. ISBN 978-1-998923-92-2 (pbk), 978-1-998923-74-8 (ebook).

Farhad Ahmad¹

The rise and fall of civilizations has remained one of the enduring subjects of historical and philosophical inquiry. Thinkers like Ibn Khaldun, Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, and Samuel Huntington have grappled with the conditions under which civilizations flourish, stagnate, or collapse. Mohammad Zohurul Islam's 'The Decline and Fall of the Modern Civilization: Is the Collapse Inevitable?' is a very noble attempt at understanding this perennial question in the light of the present age. The book gives a thoughtful analysis on how modern civilization, despite its dazzling scientific and technological achievements, is in terminal crisis. Its collapse, he argues, is neither improbable nor distant, but an impending reality unless humanity reclaims its spiritual and ethical bearings. This book is published by the Canadian leading Islamic think tank, The Islamic Institute of Toronto (IIT).

The book is presented in six chapters, framed by a foreword by Tan Sri Dr. Syed Hamid Albar, Malaysia's former Foreign Minister, who situates Islam's argument within the failures of international governance and the erosion of moral values in world politics. The editors, Mufakkharul Anam and Shah Abdul Halim, have ensured the volume's coherence, while the design and presentation enhance its accessibility to both academic and general audiences.

At the heart of Zohurul Islam's analysis is a powerful assertion: civilizations do not collapse solely due to external conquest, economic mismanagement, or environmental disaster; they collapse primarily because of moral and spiritual decay. In this regard, the book aligns more closely with Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of asabiyyah than with purely secular historiography. As values such as justice, truth, fairness, and compassion are

¹ Researcher, Email: farhad333285@gmail.com

abandoned in favor of exploitation, materialism, and selfish gain, the moral cohesion of civilization disintegrates.

The opening chapters provide a valuable survey of civilizational theories. Ibn Khaldun's stress on group solidarity, Toynbee's "challenge and response," and Spengler's cultural morphology are carefully revisited. Islam then contrasts these with modernist and postmodernist trends: the Enlightenment's promise of rational progress has given way, he contends, to postmodern relativism, utilitarianism, and moral emptiness. Particularly striking is his argument that postmodernism, while claiming to liberate humanity from oppressive metanarratives, has left it rudderless and unable to sustain universal values. This thoughtful analysis makes the book a commendable contribution to the study of civilizations and ethical inquiry.

The second chapter is an attempt to give insight into how natural calamities, pandemics, and unforeseen disruptions—what Islam terms “acts of God”—interact with human agency in civilizational dynamics. The author carefully argues that while divine forces may shape the course of history, human responsibility and ethical conduct remain central. This is not a simplistic invocation of fate; rather, it is a nuanced analysis showing that spiritual and moral negligence makes societies more vulnerable to external shocks. Islam emphasizes that overlooking religious and ethical dimensions in analyzing civilizational change is a serious omission in much modern scholarship. By weaving together spiritual perspectives with historical evidence, he offers a unique lens for understanding crises such as pandemics, famines, and environmental disasters, illustrating how they expose underlying moral and institutional weaknesses. The chapter thus provides a thoughtful and original analysis, highlighting the interplay between divine agency and human responsibility in the making—or unmaking—of civilizations.

Chapters Three and Four form the heart of the book, engaging with present realities where Islam is at his most forceful. He discusses the moral failures of modern civilization: the sexual revolution and family breakdown, the commodification of human life, rampant consumerism, and the normalization of corruption. He is equally critical of the socio-economic injustices entrenched in global capitalism: inequality, exploitative trade, neocolonial control, and systemic oppression.

The book does not limit itself to abstract analysis; it confronts contemporary humanitarian tragedies head-on. Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and the Rohingya crisis are cited not merely as geopolitical conflicts but as moral indictments of a civilization that has lost its compass.

Particularly moving is the reference to Alan Kurdi, the Syrian child who drowned in 2015, whose image became emblematic of Europe's refugee crisis. Such examples lend the book a moral immediacy that purely theoretical works often lack, making it a compelling read for those concerned with ethics and human responsibility.

In the fifth chapter, Islam turns his attention to institutions, particularly global governance structures, and their role—or often their failure—in mitigating existential threats. He offers a penetrating critique of the United Nations, the G7, G20, and other international organizations, arguing that their effectiveness is consistently compromised by the interests of powerful states. These institutional shortcomings, he contends, exacerbate global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, nuclear proliferation, and the ethical dilemmas posed by emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. What is especially compelling is Islam's insistence that these crises cannot be addressed through technical or political fixes alone; they require ethical and moral recalibration at the civilizational level. By linking institutional weaknesses to broader existential threats, this chapter offers a deeper understanding of how the survival of modern civilization depends not only on political will but on the cultivation of ethical governance and global solidarity.

The concluding chapter is a commendable attempt to move from critique to constructive vision. Islam presents a “rescue plan” that is both ambitious and morally grounded, emphasizing the revival of universal ethical values rooted in spiritual traditions. He argues for reforming education so that it integrates moral and spiritual wisdom with scientific and technological knowledge, thereby cultivating leaders capable of guiding society ethically. The chapter also highlights the need to nurture creative minorities who can inspire moral and cultural renewal, restoring the ethical compass of society. While some readers may find the proposals aspirational rather than fully operational, the clarity of their moral intent is undeniable. By drawing on the reformist visions of thinkers like Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Malek Bennabi, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islam situates his recommendations within a rich intellectual tradition. This chapter offers a hopeful and thought-provoking roadmap, inviting readers to reflect on how ethical, spiritual, and institutional renewal can work in tandem to avert civilizational collapse.

The strengths of the book are considerable. Its interdisciplinary breadth allows the reader to see history, philosophy, religion, and politics woven into

a single tapestry. Its moral urgency distinguishes it from works that are content with detached description. The author's ability to integrate Islamic and Western intellectual traditions makes the book accessible to a wide readership. At the same time, certain limitations should be noted. Some sweeping claims about moral decline would benefit from stronger empirical substantiation, particularly statistical or sociological evidence. The "rescue plan," though inspiring, could be more detailed in terms of practical strategies, especially for plural societies where the place of religion in public education remains contested. Finally, while the book rightly highlights global injustices, it could have devoted more space to acknowledging sites of resistance, renewal, and moral creativity already at work in contemporary societies.

Despite these reservations, *The Decline and Fall of the Modern Civilization* is a significant contribution to the study of civilizations, ethics, and global affairs. It is not merely a chronicle of decline but a clarion call for renewal. In an age when the Doomsday Clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight, Islam reminds us that the true danger is not only technological or political but moral and spiritual. This is a book that will appeal to scholars of Islamization of knowledge, Islamic thought, students of history and philosophy, policymakers concerned with global governance, and general readers seeking to make sense of the crises of our time. Above all, it is an invitation to serious reflection on what it means to live ethically and responsibly in a world on the brink. Islam's work is thus both timely and timeless. It recalls the lessons of past civilizations, diagnoses the ailments of the present, and gestures toward a more humane and ethical future. For those willing to listen, it offers not only critique but also hope—a noble and valuable contribution to civilizational thought.