

Terminal Condition

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caveat lector

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No human condition endures forever, with the corollary that the more complicated such a condition, the greater its susceptibility to change. —from *The Last Castle*
by Jack Vance

Imagine a juggler. Imagine that he's on stage, in front of an audience. Imagine that he's juggling eggs.

Off stage, out of sight of the audience, there's a man with a big basket of eggs. Every so often, the man off stage throws an egg at the juggler. When that happens, the juggler has to catch the new egg and add it to the ones that he's juggling. Every time he adds an egg to his act, he has to throw the eggs harder and higher, to keep them going. Every time he has to catch a new egg, his act gets more difficult.

To the audience, the increment of difficulty with each new egg might not be obvious, especially if the juggler doesn't want to appear stressed. Maybe he just keeps smiling.

The man off stage keeps throwing eggs at the juggler. The juggler keeps working harder and harder. He keeps throwing the eggs higher and higher. Even if he misses an egg occasionally, he can still keep juggling. However, every time he misses an egg, there's another slick place on the floor. When his assistant tries to clean up the floor, she gets in his way. Every time an egg hits the juggler in the face, his vision might become a little more blurred. Every time an egg breaks in his hand, his grip will become a little more slippery. Meanwhile, the assistant, trying to help, keeps getting in the way. While the audience is enjoying the act, the situation is becoming more desperate. The unending growth is unsustainable. Such a situation cannot remain under control forever. No matter how good the juggler is, eventually he's going to drop the eggs.

That is the U.S. economy.

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