

Metacrisis: A Conceptual History

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March 12, 2026

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The concept of *metacrisis* means something very specific to me. I will show you that it is not exactly a brand new word. Rather, a long and slow-burning semantic shift has brought us to a *new and more complete* understanding of its full potential.

A metacrisis is a complex system whose elements are crises, and it exhibits, as a unified whole, its own unique behaviors and properties beyond those found in its elemental crises. Moreover, it is defined by a state-space that includes both actual and possible crises—where if a metacrisis was a musical instrument, it could simultaneously be emitting the sound of a chord, and have other chords which are silent but present. This means that, as a concept, a metacrisis is both temporal (the actual state of things right now) and atemporal (the constant qualities and possibilities). Every crisis we experience maps one part of the realm of unknown possibilities. When a crisis resolves, it is not gone—it's *imprinted* on the metacrisis map.

This view builds upon conceptual history, yet goes beyond it. I hope to show you that the way I define this concept is not at odds with either its historical uses or the prevailing trends in the way it's invoked today. Rather, I argue that my version of the metacrisis concept both includes and transcends all the rest.

Why should you care? Because, as the quantity and complexity of crises in a metacrisis increases, it becomes more and more likely that those seeking to address any single crisis will do so with unforeseen results rippling through the rest of the system. We accidentally break what we're trying to fix. This is sometimes called *iatrogenesis*—medicine that makes you sicker.



Photo by Anirudh

Beginnings

I published my book on the *metacrisis* concept two years ago now. At first I thought: *let me see what's developed over the last couple of years*. But then I thought: *let me go back 6000 years just to make sure I didn't miss anything*. This essay offers a conceptual history primarily told through the word's appearance in books. There are some essays, theses, and other academic works mixed in. But, because this search was born from the impulse to reflect on my own book, my aim was to find other books in which the metacrisis concept was a primary focus.



The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts

Author: Reinhart Koselleck

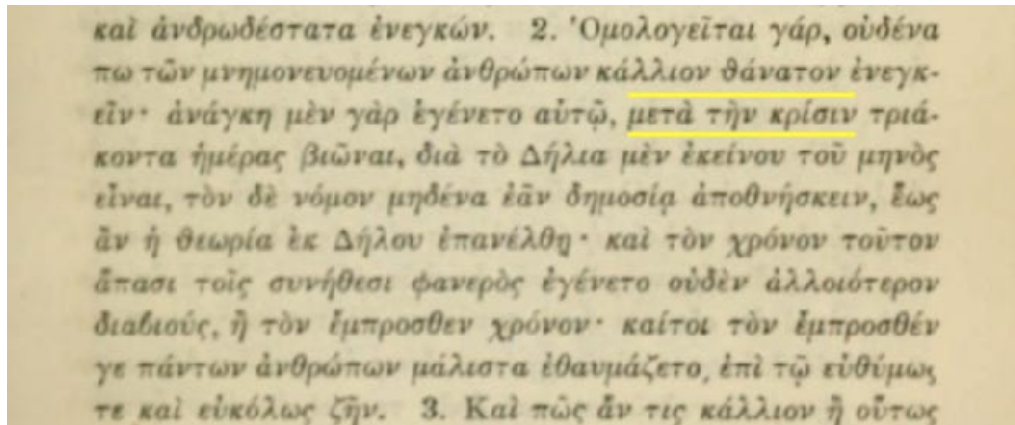
Summary: Before we get to “metacrisis”, I’d like to briefly explore the ancient origin of the singular “crisis”. It is derived from the Proto-Indo-European word *krei*, which Calvert Watkins defines as “to sieve, discriminate, distinguish”. Its context was agricultural—as in the separation of wheat from chaff. This word would have been circulating for up to 4000 years before it entered the consciousness of Ancient Greece.

Separately, sometime around the year 1000BCE, the Chinese word *jī* appeared in the *I Ching*. It meant something like “turning point” and is now part of the modern Chinese word for crisis: *weiji*. This is a case of parallel evolution—the ancient Chinese and Greeks did not, at that point, have contact that we know of. The Ancient Greeks did not need to borrow the concept from the Chinese; nor did the Chinese language have to borrow from Proto-Indo-European. It seems, rather, that crises—as decisive points of change or moments that distinguish actuality from possibility—are a feature of reality that people have independently discovered.

This highlights how conceptual development is driven by civilizational needs. Reinhart Koselleck’s authoritative essay reveals the Ancient Greek needs which gave rise to their meaning of *crisis*:

“‘Crisis’ belongs among the fundamental concepts, that is to say, irreplaceable concepts, of the Greek language. Derived from *krino*, to cut, to select, to decide, to judge; by extension, to measure, to quarrel, to fight- ‘crisis’ aimed at a definitive, irrevocable decision. The concept implied strict alternatives that permitted no further revision: success or failure, right or wrong, life or death, and finally, salvation or damnation.”

Koselleck specifically highlights three crucial contexts for *krisis*: decisive battles in wars, critical bifurcations (for better or worse) in the course of a disease, and the outcome or enforcement of law. In works like Plato’s *Republic*, we see the word used frequently when referring to a judge or judgement. Perhaps even more tantalizing is the appearance of *meta tēn krisin* in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, seen below.



In this passage, Xenophon uses “meta” in the sense of “after”—in particular *after the judgement (or trial/sentence)* of Socrates.

Evan’s verdict: An instrumental historical overview of the singular *crisis* concept. We use the word in a way that is different from the Ancient Greeks, but is undoubtedly connected. I especially loved this gem in which Koselleck quotes Gottfried Leibniz:

“*Momenta temporum pretiosissima sunt in transitu rerum.*”

“*The most precious moments of time are in the transition of things.*” That’s one to think on as we reflect on our metacrisis.



Die Schrift des Albertus de Zancariis aus Bologna

Author: Albertus de Zancariis, Manuel Morris

Summary: This dissertation by Manuel Morris, *Die Schrift des Albertus de Zancariis aus Bologna*, collects the writings of Zancariis, a physician who lived from approximately 1280-1348. Here is the relevant quote:

“*Denn besser ist zu schweigen, als sich zu irren, wie Galen im ersten (Buch) der Metacrisis im zwölften Kapitel beschrieben hat.*”

Zancariis is referring to Galen’s work *De Crisibus* (*On Crises*). What we can see from this is that when Galen wrote about crises circa 165CE, he did so in the medical context associated with the Ancient Greek concept, championed by Hippocrates, explored above. And, sometime in the subsequent centuries, writers found it necessary to attach the *meta* prefix to signify the phase directly *after/beyond* a crisis (as the crucial turning point in a disease).

Evan's verdict: I didn't read the whole *Schrift* and I don't think you need to, either. But this stop on our timeline demonstrates that *crisis* and *metacrisis* are not only woven into our deep past, but have remained in continuous use for millennia.



Dizionario tecnico-etimologico-filologico

Author: Marco Aurelio Marchi

Summary: The next twist in the story comes from 1829, appearing in *Dizionario tecnico-etimologico-filologico*. *Metacrisi(s)* is formed here from the Greek *meta* + *krino* (the verb form of *krisis*). It is also defined with the word *giudicare*, Italian for *to judge*. Along with *crisi trasferita*—the latter word, meaning *transfer/move*, giving this phrase the meaning of *changed judgement* or *changed crisis*.

METÀCRISI, METACRISIS, Med., da metà (meta), di là, e da κρίνω (crinō), giudicare. Crisi trasferita.

This entry shows that the terms *crisis* and *metacrisis* still had predominantly medical and judicial meanings around this time. However, as noted in Randolph Starn's excellent essay *Historians and "Crisis"*, the winds were shifting—the historical conception of *crisis* was expanding:

"An Italian lexicographer who complained of gross abuse to the medical term in the 1860s apparently remained a minority of one. Although it was used in self-conscious quotation marks or with a word of explanation until well into the nineteenth century, 'crisis' had been rapidly extended to cover virtually any time of trouble or tension."

Starn further quotes heavy-hitters like Goethe and Nietzsche to show how *crisis* was both retaining its conceptual heritage and finding new uses through expansive metaphor. Goethe wrote:

"All transitions are crises; and is a crisis not a sickness?"

This quip shows that people were beginning to use the crisis concept to refer to transitional states in all domains. Nietzsche, seeing both "sickness" and "cure" in the word, wrote:

"In praise of crisis, we might first say that passion is the mother of great things... The crisis itself is an expedient of nature, like a fever... The crisis is to be regarded as a new nexus of growth."

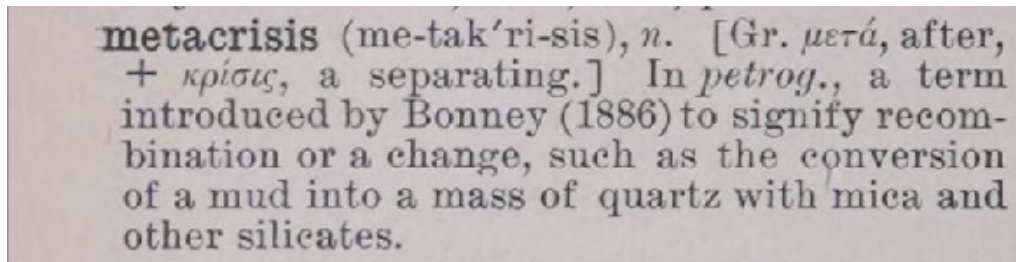
Evan's verdict: This dictionary shows that variations of *meta* and *crisis* continued to be used together, especially in medical contexts and anything involving judgement. It was also a time in which the term *crisis* became enriched with new contextual meanings that inform our present understanding of the term.



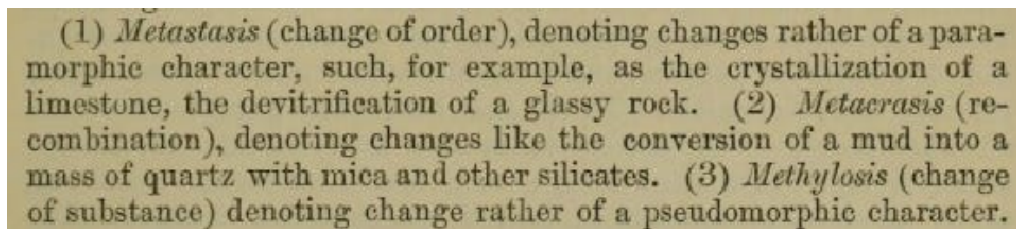
The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia

Author: Benjamin E. Smith

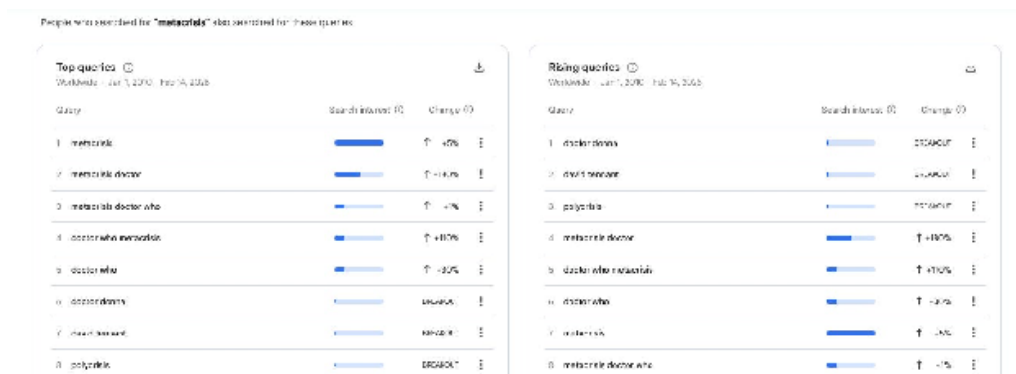
Summary: I found a reference to what first appeared to be a valid entry of *metacrisis* in this [1914 dictionary](#). See below.



The reference is to Thomas George Bonney's work in the 1886 edition of *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*. However, this is actually a longstanding typo of "metacrisis". The *crisis chameleon* here is the Greek *krâsis* (κρᾶσις), which can mean *mixing, blending, combination*. I thought this was worth correcting. See the relevant part of Bonney's work below.



But this mistake goes deeper than one old dictionary. Allow me to explain, by way of an unexpected connection. As you can see, [Doctor Who's version of a metacrisis](#) dominates many of the search results for the term.



However, the meaning ascribed within the show’s universe is oddly similar to that of *metacrisis*. As in the following quote from the [Tardis Wiki](#):

“Human-Time Lord *metacrisis* was the term applied to a hybridised organism that combined the traits of a Time Lord and a human... The regenerative energies present within the hand combined with Donna's human DNA, causing an instantaneous biological *metacrisis*.”

This *recombination* is certainly closer to Bonney’s *metacrisis* than it is to any version of *crisis* or *metacrisis* we’ve seen so far. In fact, the ancient root word *krei* and the Greek *krisis* that developed from it were associated with meanings that were the polar opposite of combination.

I considered the following explanations: (1) Russell T Davies—with his love of technobabble and portmanteaus—independently came up with *metacrisis*, and just happened to give it a definition that perfectly and uncannily aligns with that of Bonney’s *metacrisis*, mirroring a century-old linguistic mixup, while simultaneously calling it *biological* to distinguish it from *geological*; or (2) The writers wanted to find a cool, niche sci-fi-esque way of saying “recombination”, searched an old dictionary like this one, and found this red herring *metacrisis* entry. Both of these seem like very strange coincidences. Perhaps even stranger is that the effect is the same either way: Due to the popularity of Doctor Who, *metacrisis* is becoming semantically associated with recombination—a meaning that is better suited to *metacrisis*.

Evan’s verdict: This is a meaningful detour that reveals something about conceptual history—it’s not always a logical, intentional process. Meaning is shaped by use, and so misuse can disfigure meaning. I think this is important given how dominant Doctor Who is in the search results for *metacrisis*. Bring back Bonney! I actually like these two terms together—as in “*our metacrisis is bringing about a civilizational metacrisis*”. No need to stay here for any longer unless you just love reading dictionaries.

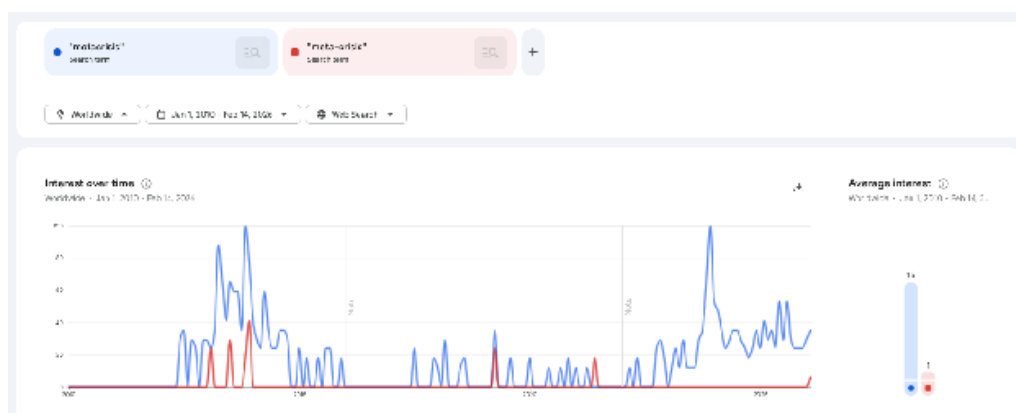
The Early Heydays

The books in this section reference the *metacrisis* concept in a way that is closer to the present than the past explored so far. And yet, they still have what I would consider a limited/incomplete view of the concept. This is not to say that such work should be ignored—on the contrary, each one illuminates part of the territory we are mapping.

The term *metacrisis* has been used throughout the last century in ways that build on earlier conceptual foundations and expand the boundaries of its meaning. The most common usage from this recent historical period relates simply to a single crisis that is “meta” to another crisis. Other uses of the word reference what I argue should be called a “polycrisis”.

Most of what I found from throughout the last century was not noteworthy enough to include here. Instead, I compiled this *Bibliography of Books, Theses, and Dissertations Mentioning a Metacrisis*. Each entry has the title, author, date, and a representative quote—or in many cases, the only quote—on a “metacrisis” or “meta-crisis”. In these works, this word is not central to the book, but rather mentioned in passing. There are lots of medical, psychological, and political works here, because such literature tended to have crises as their subjects. Authors found themselves referencing *the metacrisis of liberalism* or how a patient was experiencing *a metacrisis relating to the diagnosis of a crisis*.

In my view, the concept began to solidify into something greater than this throughout the last few decades especially.



Key thinkers began popping up and advancing concepts relating to metacrisis theory. The intellectual influences are vast, so here are just some of the main threads that come to mind: cybernetics and complexity science (Edgar Morin, Francis Heylighen, Valentin Turchin), Metamodernism (Hanzi Freinacht, Lene Rachel Andersen), Integral Theory (Ken Wilber, Layman Pascal), CosmoErotic Humanism (Zak Stein, Marc Gafni), and Game B/IDW (Daniel Schmachtenberger, Jim Rutt). I’ve found a lot of kindred thinking in these threads; and I’ve also developed my own theory of the metacrisis concept that goes *beyond the sum of these parts*, as they say. Let’s explore the next plot points in the story that brought us here.



The Social Welfare Forum: The Survival of Mankind

Author: Robert Theobald

Summary: This piece from the 1972 National Conference on Social Welfare is an interesting early example of *metacrisis* being used to mean “crisis of crises”.

“The classic story of the failure of a culture in the medium-run is that of the ‘saber-toothed tiger curriculum.’ The elders of a certain tribe continued to teach their young men how to deal with the threat posed by the

saber-toothed tiger although the tiger was dying out and new threats to survival were emerging. The protests of the young were insufficient to change policy, and eventually the tribe died out. But our problem is not at the saber-toothed tiger level. We are in a crisis of crises, a *METAcrisis*. We do not need to know how to protect ourselves from different predators. Rather we need to develop new ways of thinking: we have to break out of the lose-lose and win-lose models within which we presently see the world and develop win-win models. In other words, we must cease to believe that we can only win when somebody else loses; we must learn to understand the possibility that both sides can gain from truly cooperative thinking and action.”

Evan’s verdict: This sounds a lot like something the people mentioned just above would say—except 45 years earlier. It’s a good essay that uses *metacrisis* in a way which is much closer to our present meaning than the older works we’ve looked at so far. It at least outlines how a metacrisis is a crisis whose elements are also crises. It points towards *meta* as root-cause and as that which goes *beyond*. I think there are valid reasons why thinkers have gravitated towards crises in education, problem-solving, and epistemic collapse when they think of what’s *meta*. And certainly an education crisis is *meta* to many others. But my suggestion is that we take this nestedness as a feature of our metacrisis, rather than as the thing itself.



Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium

Author: Edgar Morin

Summary: The English translation of *Terre-Patrie*, the book in which Edgar Morin coined “polycrisis”. An author like Morin also stands out from the list of people above for entering into the conversation decades before the rest. I think the lineage of cyberneticians and complexity theorists forms a foundational pillar of present-day metacrisis theory. The concept remains incomplete without it. That intellectual chain stretches back further than this book to pioneers like Norbert Weiner and Ross Ashby. And now that our understanding of complex systems has matured, it enables us to study our metacrisis through lenses such as Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety, Turchin’s Metasystem Transition Theory, Friston’s Free Energy Principle, and more.

Evan’s verdict: A significant step in the timeline of the metacrisis and polycrisis concepts. We simply can’t have a complete view of our metacrisis without integrating ideas like these.



Personal, Educational and Organizational Transformation: Leading During Times of Metacrisis

Author: Judi Neal

Summary: This book is representative of others I encountered, in which the usage of *metacrisis* would have been better served by *polycrisis*, as in the quote below.

“We live in a time of *Metacrisis*, an era in which several major crises occur at the same time.”

This book, like others from the last decade, are more likely to mention a metacrisis, but also more likely to convey unclear or incomplete understandings of the concept. In *Post Capitalist Philanthropy*, Alnoor Ladha and Lynn Murphy write:

“We can call this moment in history the meta-crisis, the poly-crisis, civilisational collapse, the great transition, the great unravelling, the Anthropocene, the Kali Yuga, or any other descriptor (some of these we will use interchangeably).”

I would argue that lines like this confuse conceptual clarity—we can, and should, be more clear.

Evan’s verdict: This work, like other polycrisis research, likely contains some value for those who are interested in confronting our metacrisis, but it is most accurate to say this is a book belongs among the former of these, not the latter. Check out titles like *Navigating the Polycrisis*—but don’t get stuck there; we still have to make the move from *poly* to *meta*.

2024 and Beyond

The preceding sections detail the path leading up to our present decade. But since my book came out in March 2024, I was particularly interested in the conceptual development of the last two years. The books in this section are, at the very least, written by humans and mention a metacrisis. Even setting that rather low bar, *metacrisis* is, more often than not, still only being mentioned in passing. I selected the following books because, relative to most others, they make our metacrisis a central focus.



First Principles and First Values: Forty-Two Propositions on CosmoErotic Humanism, the Meta-Crisis, and the World to Come

Author: David Temple, Marc Gafni, Zak Stein, Ken Wilber

Summary: A truly relevant book about our metacrisis and possible ways to address it. I would argue that *metacrisis* is conceptually employed by the authors in sophisticated way, even when its not fully differentiated from polycrisis, as in the following quote:

“A response is needed to the likely self-induced extinction of our species, the second shock of existence. And it must be found in the context of cascading and interrelated crises across all major sectors of civilization—i.e., the meta-crisis.”

Other times, some feature of the metacrisis is named as the thing itself. In other words, these writers tended to call certain, individual crises “the metacrisis”, in reference to “the crisis at the root of others” or “the crisis which has the most detrimental effects on all other crises”. This meaning seems to have been highly influenced by Edgar Morin’s work in books like *La Voie* and *Homeland Earth*. I don’t see Jim Houghan’s 1975 book, *Decadence*, mentioned as often, but he also wrote about similar themes:

“A Gizmo culture is one in which each element in the means of production and the modes of consumption is linked to and dependent upon every other element. Nothing is less than strategic. A fluctuation in one sector induces a variation in a second area, which, in its turn, generates disruption in a third... and so on. The process is a chain reaction of crises leading to a prevailing metacrisis in which almost nothing works... Our most probable future seems to be one of an ongoing metacrisis managed by an emerging power elite of technicians, terminating—as it must—in eventual technical collapse. Only a single mismanaged crisis is necessary to reduce the society to a chaos from which it cannot recover.”

In my book, I argue that this nested hierarchal structure of crises is merely a feature of a metacrisis, or a corollary to other more fundamental principles. The authors of *First Principles and First Values* correctly point out: broken metaphysics, dysfunctional education, a collapse of meaning, and other important crises. But I reiterate that none of these are, themselves, *the metacrisis*. I would call them “deep” crises, or high-leverage nodes in our metacrisis. Jonathan Rowson’s essay, *Tasting the Pickle*, is excellent and has similar themes. That essay also appears in *Dispatches from a Time Between Worlds*. Other similar collections include:

- **The Evolution of Love from Quarks to Culture:** The Rise of Evolutionary Relationships in Response to the Meta-Crisis (by Marc Gafni)
- **Education in a Time Between Worlds:** Essays on the Future of Schools, Technology, & Society (by Zak Stein)
- **Remembrances of the Future:** Evolution, Politics, Religion, Meta-Crisis: First Notes on CosmoErotic Humanism. Notes and Reflections 2015-2018 (By David Temple, Marc Gafni, Zak Stein, Ken Wilber)

Evan’s verdict: This work and the various others mentioned here are definitely worth reading if you haven’t already encountered these authors. Spend some time here so you can appreciate the evolution of our present concept.



UTOK: The Unified Theory of Knowledge

Author: Gregg Henriques

Summary: This interesting and ambitious book is part of a larger project. Gregg Henriques and his frequent collaborator, John Vervaeke, focus primarily on the psychological, meaning-oriented aspects of our metacrisis. The meaning crisis is close to my heart as well, and I spend a major portion of my first book discussing it. That's because I think there is a very strong argument to be made that it is the "deepest" crisis within our metacrisis. Or in other words, that resolving this crisis would have the most profound effect on the entirety of our metacrisis. Henriques give the following definition, which is different from my own, but shows how much the word has evolved.

"Meta-Crisis: Refers to the current state of societal flux and change that potentially is going to result in global civilization collapse. UTOK divides the multiplicity of challenges into four broad domains, which include: 1) the techno-environmental crisis, which consists of both the damage we are doing to the planet and our capacity to damage the planet by technologies like nuclear weapons; 2) the digital-globalization crisis which refers to the processes by which digital-computational technologies are resulting in a rapid shift in media that threatens the basic institutional infra-structure, in addition to opening up massive new potentials; 3) the meaning crisis, which, stemming from the Enlightenment Gap, represents the failure to develop coherent philosophies for living in the 21st Century, and 4) the mental health crisis, which points to higher levels of anxiety, depression, suicide and drug use than we have seen and is diagnostic of a failure of modern culture to evolve toward wise living."

Evan's verdict: If you are specifically interested in psychological and metaphysical aspects of our metacrisis, read this book or find other work by Henriques and Vervaeke.



Seeking Shangri-La: Awakening to the Metacrisis

Author: Tor Syvrud

Summary: The author of this book is aware of our metacrisis, enough to put the word in its title. But, to my surprise, the term does not appear anywhere in the actual text.

I read part of it, and feel that the best explanation for this book is that it is someone's attempt to *confront* our metacrisis, not to conceptually define it. This could arguably mark an interesting turning point in which authors begin referencing the concept without feeling obligated to give a definition. Perhaps that reflects the growing maturity of the concept, and that we should expect to see more work that invokes the metacrisis concept with the understanding that readers already know what it means.

Syvrud's book comes across as poetry for those who are already aware of our metacrisis. And I believe there is value in such things—in contrast with work like my own which has a far more academic flavor. Poetry, novels, and other forms of writing are likely to reach audiences who would never agree to read a dissertation. A brief sample showcases the unique style of this work:

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*"Your mind is constructed through pattern recognition,
and your life experience becomes your model of the world.
The structure of your mind is repetition,
is a recursive feedback loop,
is identification (union) with constructed contents."*

Evan's verdict: I think that what someone might get out of this book will vary wildly from person to person. Read more if the quote above speaks to you. If not, move on.

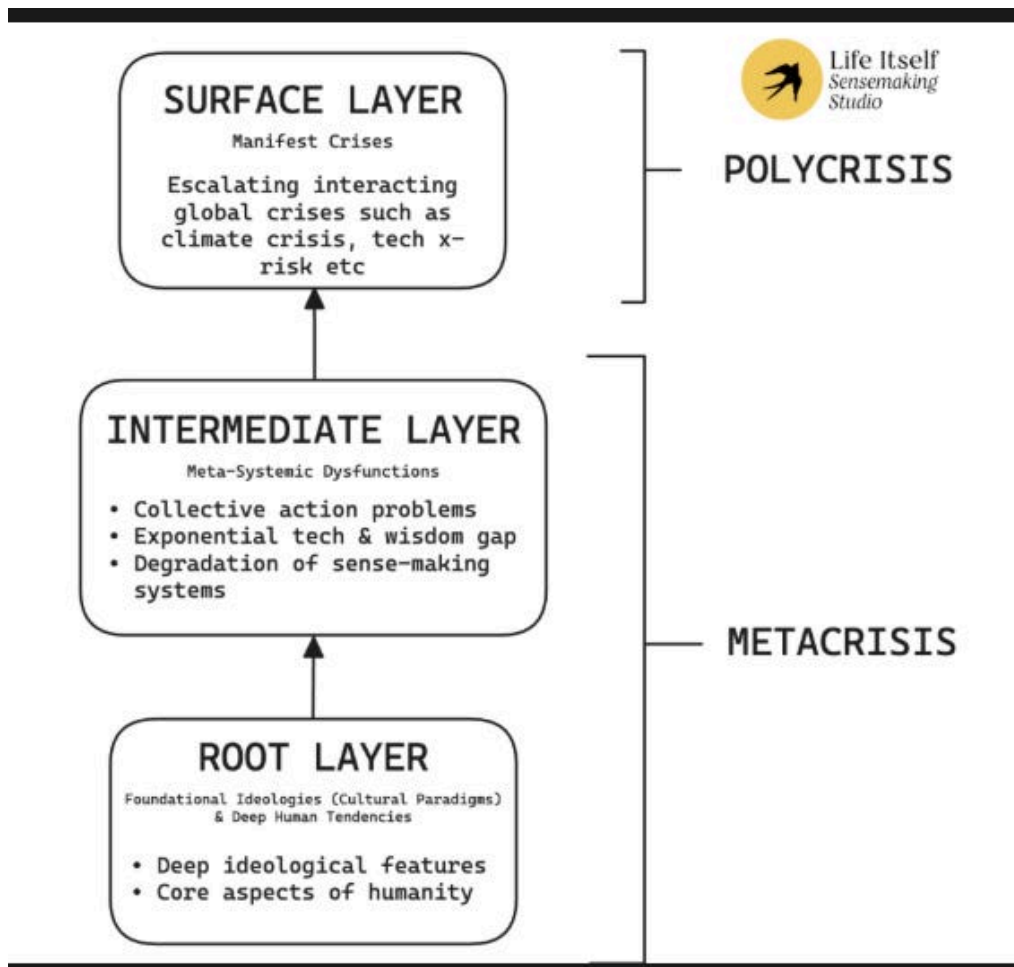


True Human: Reimagining Ourselves at the End of Our World

Author: Samantha Sweetwater

Summary: A recent book that, like the one mentioned just above, genuinely focuses on our metacrisis without spending much time on defining the concept.

Sweetwater cites a white paper titled *From Polycrisis to Metacrisis* (by Rufus Pollock and Rosie Bell) for her definition of metacrisis. This is both good and bad, in my opinion. It's good because it means this book aims to build on the limited existing literature. It's bad because the white paper cited above separates *polycrisis* and *metacrisis*—visually depicted below.



From Polycrisis to Metacrisis / Rufus Pollock & Rosie Bell

I like that it's trying to differentiate these terms, but I think at the same time, *polycrisis* must be integrated into *metacrisis*. Any given polycrisis is part of our metacrisis—not “stacked on top” of it. Here is another example, from Matthias Muhlert's *Philosophy.exe*, that shows this usage:

“To effectively address global challenges, it is crucial to distinguish between poly-crises and meta-crises, as each requires different approaches. Poly-crises involve multiple simultaneous crises that may or may not reinforce one another but stem from different causes. In contrast, meta-crises are deeper systemic problems that underlie many of these individual crises, often acting as the root causes of broader issues.”

I do appreciate attempts to *krei* these two concepts. And it shows that other contemporary authors see them as useful in different ways. But, as I've been arguing, *metacrisis* can and should conceptually include both “multiple simultaneous crises” and crises “that underlie many of these crises”.

Despite leaning somewhat on the poly/meta divide, Sweetwater's use of *metacrisis* actually contains elements of both, as with this significant quote:

“We are in a metacrisis of compounding, mutually reinforcing mega-crises on ecological, economic, technological, geopolitical, and public health fronts, with significant short-, mid- and long-term existential risks posed by nuclear war, AI misalignment, synthetic biology, toxicity, ecological collapse, and epistemic meltdown, all of them predicated on and potentiated by the game dynamics of a system that requires continuous growth for its survival. We are increasingly, anxiously aware of the root misalignment between the incentives and structures of our civilizational operating system and the well-being of the biosphere.”

Evan’s verdict: Worthwhile. Referencing a plethora of interdependent crises, game dynamics, and our civilizational operating system puts Sweetwater’s book head-and-shoulders above most other work on the *metacrisis* concept. If the author and I were imagining a better future, I think we would have more similarities than differences. This book complements my own, rather than being in any way mutually exclusive. It’s not what I would have written—and in this case that’s good! Check out her [work on Substack](#).



Mothering Economy: An Exploration of Mothering Principles to Help Build a World Beyond the Limitations of Twentieth Century Thinking

Author: Jenny Grettve

Summary: This fascinating little book has both a clear view on our metacrisis, and proposals for addressing it. Over the course of several chapters, Grettve speaks about some timely crises—such as those involving environmental and sociopolitical issues—and attempts to address them via mothering principles. The following quote, which nods to Kate Raworth’s [Doughnut Economics](#), illustrates a small part of this vision.

“That scale of impact has led to what many call a ‘planetary crisis’ or ‘metacrisis,’ which points to a deeper pattern that connects all risks and crises into a single coherent field. The Civilizational Research Institute (CRI) describes the metacrisis as ‘a higher order whole, with unique dynamics and unforeseen consequences. The metacrisis is both seen and unseen, taking place above and below the surface of what is visible and obvious.’ Many are now trying to grasp the complexity of these massive and interrelated problems, but also to find solutions at the same scale and impact... At first glance, what Raworth did might sound too simple in the midst of ‘serious’ economic solutions to our metacrisis, but with the outstanding global appreciation of the model, it becomes clear that the solutions we need can be showcased and talked about in uncomplicated ways.”

I love this final point because, let’s face it, these are highly complex subjects. If we truly wish to confront the challenges of our metacrisis in a timely way, clearly communicated goals are necessary. It is a civilization-scale endeavor, and that starts with getting more of us on the same page.

Evan’s verdict: This is a distinctive addition to a small-but-growing body of metacrisis literature. I appreciate Grettve’s assessment that we must find “*solutions at the same scale and impact*”. I made the same point in my own book, that “*the first step in addressing a metacrisis is meeting it at its own level of complexity*”.

The Slopfest

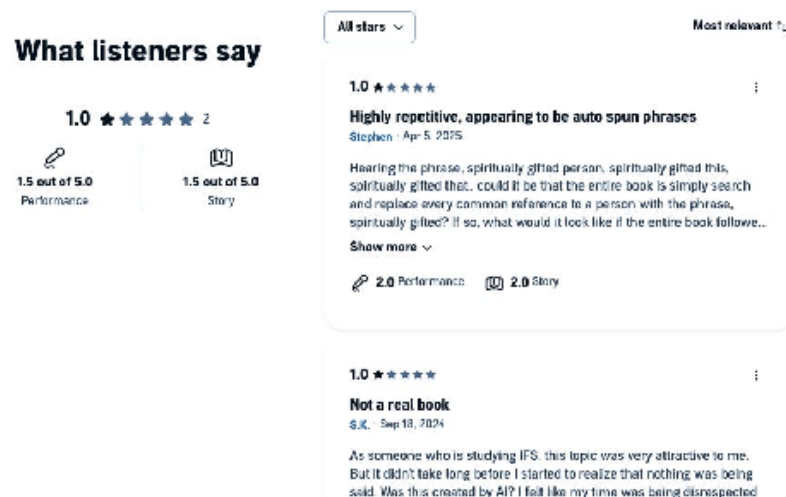
Maybe I shouldn’t have been surprised. But I was. The knockoffs have arrived! The books in this section were likely produced by AI and have little to no value beyond marginally adding awareness to a crucially important subject. Perhaps even giving them that is overly generous.



The Luminous Self: The Revolutionary Method for Integrating Every Part of Who You Are Into Your Greatest Power and Authentic Expression

Author: Ammanuel Santa Anna

Summary: The first “book” in a 10-part series called “*Luminous Holonics - A Solution to the Meta-Crisis*”. The author bio on Amazon claims he has written over 200 books in four years... Impressive! It took me longer than that to write just one book. I must be an idiot compared to this guy. His audiobooks have reviews from angry customers who have also identified his work as AI slop.



The screenshot shows the 'What listeners say' section for an audiobook. It features a star rating of 1.0 out of 5.0 for both Performance and Story. Two reviews are visible, both with 1.0 star ratings. The first review, by Stephen, dated April 5, 2025, is titled 'Highly repetitive, appearing to be auto spun phrases' and criticizes the repetitive use of the phrase 'spiritually gifted'. The second review, by S.K., dated September 18, 2024, is titled 'Not a real book' and suggests the content may be AI-generated.

What listeners say

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All stars ▾ Most relevant ↑

1.0 ★★★★★

Highly repetitive, appearing to be auto spun phrases

Stephen · Apr 5, 2025

Hearing the phrase, spiritually gifted person, spiritually gifted this, spiritually gifted that.. could it be that the entire book is simply search and replace every common reference to a person with the phrase, spiritually gifted? If so, what would it look like if the entire book followe...

Show more ▾

2.0 Performance 2.0 Story

1.0 ★★★★★

Not a real book

S.K. · Sep 18, 2024

As someone who is studying IFS, this topic was very attractive to me. But it didn't take long before I started to realize that nothing was being said. Was this created by AI? I felt like my time was being disrespected

Evan’s verdict: This would be funny if it wasn’t a bit scary. Steven Bird argues that *Big AI is Accelerating the Metacrisis*. The argument that low-quality work of this type could have negative effects on our metacrisis seems plausible given that earlier authors frequently cited educational and epistemic crises as

core parts of the bigger picture. A metacrisis makes its own crises—adding fuel to its own fire. And this kind of epistemic pollutant stands as a potent example.



Anatomia della Metacrisi: Lo scenario contemporaneo attraverso la lente della Conoscenza Tradizionale

Author: Dharma Protocol

Summary: One more example before we move on from the slop. The book's title in English is: *Anatomy of the Metacrisis: The contemporary scenario through the lens of Traditional Knowledge*. Once I translated the opening text into English, I could tell that it was the work of an LLM, made with little or no human-influence. Unless you count humans like myself who have actually contributed to this space.

Human terminology for describing the state of the world system is inadequate. The word "crisis" has lost its diagnostic specificity, applied indiscriminately to every perturbation (financial, ecological, political, social) as if they were isolated events. This interpretive model, based on separation and sequentiality, is obsolete—a residue of an era when global subsystems were decoupled and shocks could be absorbed locally. That era has ended; the model of "crisis" as a temporary deviation from a stable norm is obsolete. It fails to grasp the current total interconnection and systemic resonance. The phenomena are not multiple crises, but manifestations of a single transition process, symptoms of a structural failure of the operating architecture of late-modern civilization. Using the lexicon of "crises" is imprecise, a cognitive self-deception that prevents effective diagnosis and intervention, like applying Newtonian mechanics to quantum phenomena.



Evan's verdict: Apparently this is "*the first transmission of the Dharma Protocol*"... Am I actually lost on an island and hallucinating all of this? Skip this book.

Theses and Dissertations

Since our options for books are still thin, here are the most relevant theses and dissertations. I've selected just the ones that explicitly focus on our metacrisis, rather than mentioning it en route to other topics.

- **Visionary realism and the emergence of a eudaimonistic society: metatheory in a time of metacrisis** (by Nicholas Hancock Hedlund)
- **Source Code Alchemy: What, Why and How?** (by Marianne Fitzgerald)
- **African cosmic complexity, food production and the situation of (meta-)polycrisis** (by Mitchell-Ron Black)
- **The Meta-Crisis in Education: Towards a Complex Integral Realist Theory of Education and Affective Axiological Orientation** (by Andrew David Botham)

- **Metabolising bigger-than-self distress through nondual enactive wisdom development:** *a layered autoethnographical study of embodied embedded psychological responses to biospheric and civilisational crises* (by Nicholas Clyde Laurence)
- **Communal Reverie:** *Toward a Formulation of Imaginal Aperspectivity and the Integral Participatory Imagination* (by Samuel C Hinds)
- **Innovation in Complex Adaptive Systems** (by Petter Törnberg)
- **Radical Middle:** *Mitigating the Meta-crisis of Polarisation, Nonunderstanding and Intolerance as Products of Underlying Differences in Value(s)* (by André Backlund)
- **Reconnect:** *Drafting an approach to ethical and regenerative urban design in response to the metacrisis* (by Elias Luoto)
- **Universifying:** *A Theory, Model & Practice to Birth Our Emerging World Through The Meta-Crisis* (by Fionn Wright)

Out of these, I feel the most intellectual resonance with Hedlund's thesis on Visionary Realism. The way he and I define and understand our metacrisis is quite similar in many regards. He has been involved in a number of other projects as well, such as Metatheory for the Twenty-First Century, and wrote the following to define the concept:

"The deep and complexly interrelated global crises—ecological, technological, political-economic, ethical, existential, and epistemic—and their underlying network of overlapping root causes. That is, the metacrisis is an emergent metasystem—a higher-order meta-structure or complex totality, that coheres in such a way that is endowed with irreducible causal powers and taxonomic properties. Those emergent powers modify, re-pattern, and determine its lower-order eco-social, ethical, existential, and epistemic components. Simultaneously, the structure of those lower-order eco-social, ethical, existential, and epistemic components causally codetermine each other, thereby causally codetermining the higher-order totality of the metacrisis."

The ancient Greek and Chinese cultures found they both needed something like the word *crisis*. And, it seems, something similar is happening now with *metacrisis*. It shows that we have objectively reached the threshold of profound civilizational transformation—giving it a name is just our human way of coming to terms with that reality and attempting to figure out what's next.

Evan's verdict: All of these theses and dissertations had something valuable to say about some aspect of our metacrisis. They also convey that the concept of *metacrisis* has matured, and is increasingly being discussed in and outside of academia. That also means, I fear, that we are running out of time to do something about it.

Global Reach

Books and other works in non-English languages have also started to use the term *metacrisis*, either through loan of the English word or else by forming its equivalent. While I did my best to include some of these in the [bibliographic addition](#) to this essay, I suspect there is much that I missed. But before we wrap up, here are a few words in other languages that are most similar to *metacrisis*:

French: *Métacrise* (as in [Qu'appelle-t-on Panser?](#) by Bernard Stiegler and [Comprendre les métacrisis par la pensée systémique](#) by Yves Zieba)

German: *Metakrise* (as in [Das Ende der Welt wie wir sie kannten](#) by Harald Welzer and Claus Leggewie)

Spanish: *Metacrisis* or *crisis civilizatoria* (as in [El Manifiesto por la Vida ante la Crisis Civilizatoria y la transición hacia un mundo sustentable](#) by Enrique Leff)

Russian: *Meta-krizis* or *sistemny krizis* (as in [The Current World Crisis: Its Social Nature and Challenge to Social Science](#) by Andrey Fursov)

Chinese: *Yuán Wēijī* (as in [State of the Heart 2024](#) by Six Seconds)

Conclusion

With all of that on the road behind us, I'd like to offer once again my simple, general-purpose definitions of three terms that have been central to this exploration:

- **Crisis:** A crucial, life-or-death moment of sudden, profound transformation, and a bifurcation between two significantly different futures.
- **Polycrisis:** A specific set/system of crises with a large amount of overlap and interdependence.
- **Metacrisis:** A complex system whose state-space is all actual and possible crises.

What I hope to convey with these distinctions is a nested hierarchy. All three are useful at different scales. A crisis can be nested within a polycrisis—and both of these are nested within our metacrisis. A crisis is singular; a polycrisis is a system; a metacrisis is a system of systems. This is not a pointless linguistic battle between *poly* and *meta*. This is a critical conceptual distinction, and *metacrisis* provides the more holistic view—the one that both includes and transcends *crisis* and *polycrisis*.

Truly *seeing* our metacrisis, in the sense I've shared with you today, can be compared to viewing our planet from space: One sees both the actual illumination of city lights, and the possible illumination of the ones that are sleeping.

Let me turn back, finally, to the all-important question: Why should you care? Here are just three practical needs that are fulfilled by my conceptual understanding of *metacrisis*:

- Antifragility/chaos engineering: By including *possible* crises within its scope, we afford ourselves the opportunity to do more than simply put out present fires. Perhaps counterintuitively, proactively breaking things (introducing chaos) is a great way to confront this possibilistic space of our metacrisis. When a chaos engineer sees a world on fire, his first move is not to put it out—it's to start his own small fire, figure out its properties and behaviors, and then apply those patterns on a large scale.
- Resisting reductionism and fragmentation: A complex system, such as a metacrisis or a pond full of fish, can't be reduced to its parts. Once it is fragmented, it ceases to be itself. This forces us into an uncomfortable but necessary frame of mind in which we must be simultaneously attentive to the elements of the system (like the organs that form an organism, or the cells that form the organs) and to the holistic integration of all of those elements which goes beyond the sum of its parts.
- Bridging personal and universal: The typical writing we explored tends towards the polycrisis framing, which highlights interconnected global crises. My view, in contrast, is that your personal crisis, however small it might seem to the rest of the world, is significant—even when compared to some global disaster. That's why it's *our* metacrisis: It belongs to us all, and we belong to it; it is both within us and beyond us.

If you want to know more about my views on our metacrisis, read [*A Metarevolutionary Manifesto*](#). So far, my favorite bit of feedback from a reader was: “*This book made me aware of brand new problems I didn't even know I had!*” Mission accomplished.