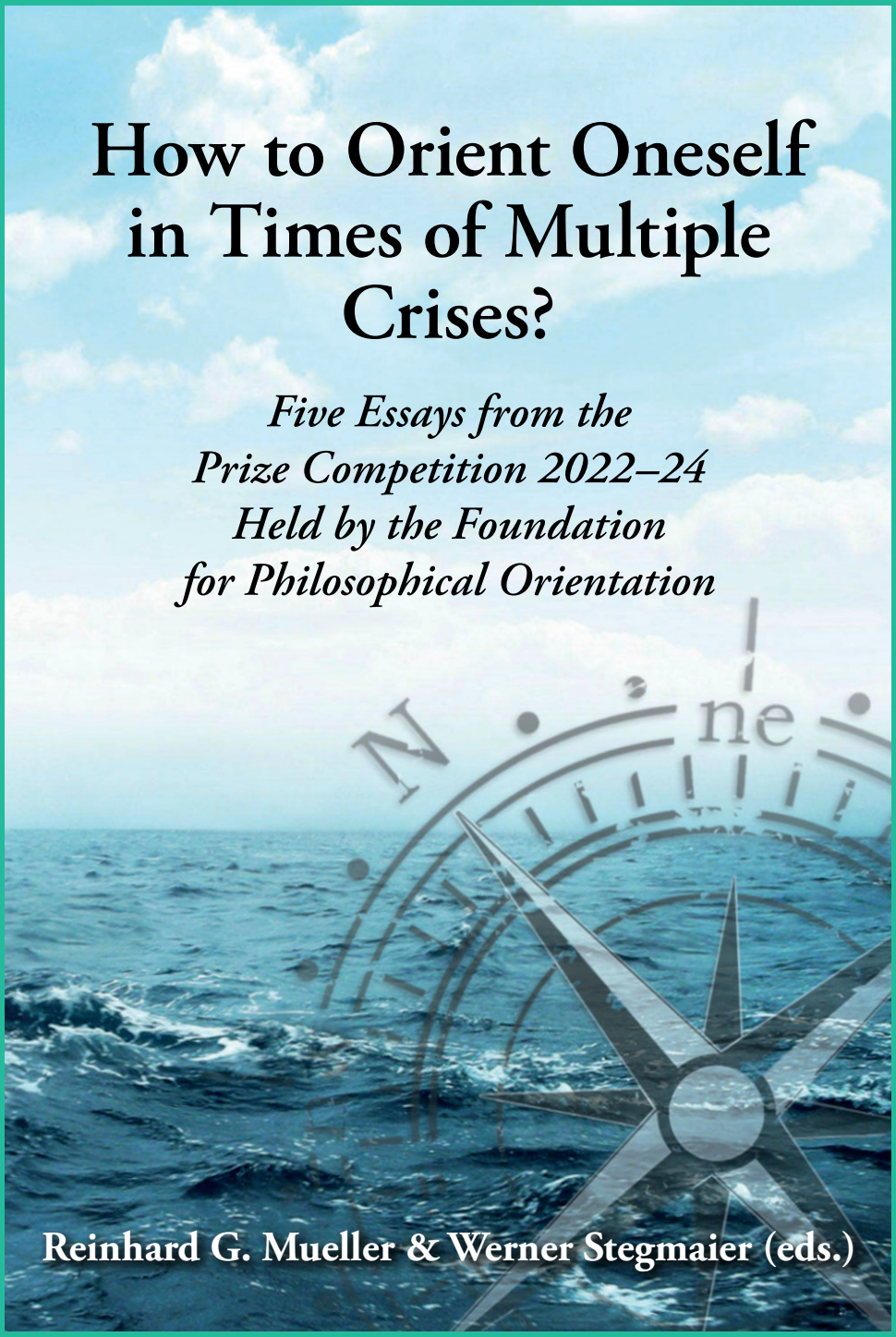
How to Orient Oneself in Times of Multiple Crises?

Five Essays from the Prize Competition 2022–24 Held by the Foundation for Philosophical Orientation



Reinhard G. Mueller & Werner Stegmaier (eds.)

Orientations Press

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Orientations Press
Nashville, 2025

Orientations Press LLC, Nashville

ISBN (softcover): 9798991601245
e-ISBN (PDF): 9798991601252
e-ISBN (EPUB): 9798991601269

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025939502

Cover image: Foundation for Philosophical Orientation Inc.

Printed in the United States by Dynamark Graphics Group, Nashville

www.orientations-press.com

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Preface: The Conception of the FPO Prize Competition

by Reinhard G. Mueller

The world undergoes profound disorientations and transformations; many societies are increasingly forced to face multiple crises simultaneously. Not only have climate change and mass migrations introduced unprecedented challenges, but fundamental geopolitical shifts and a new war in Ukraine have also destabilized a long-established world order. Political, financial, economic, and societal crises are converging, raising the critical question of how we can navigate multiple crises under intense pressure of time. It is a question that challenges our capacities for orientation, demanding both conceptual clarity and practical responsiveness.

Through our philosophical prize competitions, the *Foundation for Philosophical Orientation* continues a tradition of the Enlightenment and seeks to confront some of the most pressing reorientations of our time. We launched the prize competition, the contributions to which are published here, in 2022; the finalist's debate took place at our foundation's fifth anniversary in Nashville in October 2024. Since then our question has only grown in significance, as we now, in March 2025, face new trade wars and a fundamental renegotiation of global spheres of influence. Our interest, however, in how we orient ourselves in times of compounding crises goes beyond current political reorientations, extending to a more fundamental philosophical horizon. After our first prize competition in 2019 addressed the question of digitization in today's world, our question now was: "How to Orient Oneself in Times of Multiple Crises?"

We offered the following prize awards:

– 1st prize award: $5,000
– 2nd prize award: $4,000
– 3rd prize award: $3,000

We again announced that we would expect new, i.e., not yet published, contributions from any insightful point of view and promising philosophical perspectives. This time, we recommended that authors write approximately 20-60 pages of thorough and comprehensive philosophical research that clearly shows connections to the philosophy of orientation, as primarily developed in Werner Stegmaier's *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation*, while we also appreciated critical approaches. We furthermore added the following description and sub-questions to the announcement on our website:

> The *Foundation for Philosophical Orientation*, which is concerned with the conditions of human orientation as such, calls for clarification: We ask what means and ways of our orientation can help in such a situation of multiple crises. Disorientation could make the hardships even more difficult. What in fact are 'crises' – who perceives them when, under which conditions, and in which contexts? How do people proceed in crises, what can be observed? What could they do? Is the philosophical concept of orientation useful when dealing of multiple crises? Are our human orientation abilities themselves altogether at stake? Or are there historical examples from which we can learn? What footholds does one follow in such situations? How can one attain an overview? What uncertainties must one reckon with? Insights gained from practical experience in certain fields of orientation (environment, economics, politics, media) can also be helpful.

We received fifteen qualifying submissions. In the selection process, we, the *Foundation for Philosophical Orientation*, focused on two aspects: a) to what extent does the author engage with the prize question in a scholarly rigorous and argumentatively compelling manner? and b) to what extent does the essay make a significant contribution to the further development of the philosophy of orientation? From these fifteen essays, we invited the five finalists to an in-

person debate at our foundation's fifth anniversary, held at Nashville's Scarritt Bennett Center, where members of our board and advisory council evaluated and ranked the finalists' contributions.

Our prize competition primarily attracted participants from the younger generation, and the results were highly promising. The best five contributions emerged from Europe, where awareness of profound crises appears to be more pronounced than in the United States or other parts of the world. The finalists came from Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic. Given the high quality of both their essays and their performance during the debate, we decided to publish all five finalist essays. And we congratulate the three winners for their outstanding achievement:

The **1st prize award** went to Dr. **Yuri Di Liberto** (Italy)
for his essay on
"From Disorientation to Scientific Co-Orientation."

The **2nd prize award** was received by
Dr. **Dirk Stemper** (Germany)
for his contribution on
"Overview of Historical Polycrises – A Comparative Analysis of Their Causes and Ways of Overcoming Them."

Dr. **Nataliia Reva** (Ukraine) won the **3rd prize award** for her essay entitled
"Crises in the Personal Environment
and Ways of Overcoming Them."

The five authors agreed to the publication of their contributions in this collection of essays. Following the debate, they were given the opportunity to revise their texts, and we encouraged them to refine and condense their arguments. We are pleased to present these insightful contributions to a broader audience, as they engage with one of the most urgent philosophical questions of our time — how we orient ourselves when facing multiple crises at the same time.

Introduction: Problems and Solutions

by Werner Stegmaier

Our prize competition mainly targeted the younger generation. The results were very promising. The best five contributions came from Europe, where crisis awareness seems to be much deeper than in the USA: from countries as diverse and differently threatened as Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic. The authors wrote their papers independently of each other; they only got to know each other at the above mentioned meeting organized by the *Foundation for Philosophical Orientation* in October 2024 in Nashville, Tennessee. The very different approaches to the problem of managing multiple crises at the same time fortunately happened to complement each other. This encouraged us to publish them in *Orientations Press* for a wider audience.

The first three contributions edited here focus on taking stock, the fourth and fifth on immediately available solutions. The stocktaking refers to models of crisis management in the personal sphere, the merging of philosophical and psychological perspectives and the comparative analysis of historical polycrises. The proposed solutions recommend relying on scientific co-orientation and, as far as the climate and energy crises are concerned, on the increased use of nuclear energy. These are certainly not final and complete answers to the question of how we can orient ourselves in times of multiple crises. Nevertheless, the contributions point to plausible ways of managing them, and all these ways are paved within the framework of the philosophy of orientation. Today we are

perhaps facing one of the greatest challenges to human orientation ever, and it is not yet clear how the challenge will develop in the near and distant future.

In crises, comprehensive reorientation is required. Orientation is always reorientation to a certain degree; every new situation necessitates people to reorient themselves more or less. However, the more situations change, the more one can lose track of them, disorientation sets in and it is then no longer clear what to do. If the overview of a situation is completely lost, the disorientation is experienced as a crisis. Crises can be of a personal, political, economic, social, cultural, moral, religious, etc. type. They can, as now, threaten the life of humans and animals on earth in general, if the natural conditions of life are destroyed. Most crises occur in certain areas of life, but a crisis in one area can also affect other areas. Then we speak of multiple crises and polycrises.

They create a state of general uncertainty. The uncertainty is differently experienced from different points of view of different persons, different peoples in different countries and different cultures in the world. Whether and how crises are noticed at all always depends on how strongly someone is affected by them. In addition, the concepts of crises and even more so the concepts of multiple crises or polycrises significantly differ; this is evident also in the following contributions. There is no objective concept of crisis; crises can be observed everywhere and nowhere. Nevertheless, if crises are addressed and dealt with, they always trigger reorientations to a lesser or greater extent. That is the beneficial side of crises. A crisis is an impetus for changes in perceiving the world and conceiving of it, when the world changes. And the world changes all the time.

There are many ways to fail in dealing with crises. If you do nothing about them, you may run into personal, social and ecological disasters. If you do something, but not decisively enough, you may make crises worse. If you do all you can, you cannot be sure to do the right thing. Crises may be so complex that there are no simple solutions for them. We need to abbreviate the circumstances so that we can survey them. Abbreviations can also be right or wrong, successful or disastrous. Yet, there is a clear goal of all orientation: first and foremost, to gain stability and certainty in it and to regain it after having fallen into disorientation like in crises. So, everything comes down to security in our orientation. If we succeed and regain a sense of direction, we will have improved our skills of orientation, judgment and decision-making and then can deal with further crises more confidently and master them successfully as well.

From this perspective, crises are productive. This could also be the case in view of the multiple crises that we are now (more or less) experiencing. The current crises could push our orientation skills and virtues in unexpected, surprising ways. In philosophy, we try to create the conditions for thinking, paving and routinizing these ways.

The first contribution, *Crises in the Personal Environment and Ways of Overcoming Them* by Nataliia Reva, starts in the most comprehensive way. Reva considers the whole life as a crisis, insofar as the certainty of orientation is always threatened and disorientation may always occur. She starts from the fact that "a crisis implies a sense of urgency, instability, and the need for re-orientation and prompt and effective actions to address the encountered issue." Crises may be experienced only in certain areas of life, yet "the instability in one domain can cascade into broader disorientation and one type of orientation can come to aid another one." According to Reva, it is therefore always about "the integrity of the overall system." Thus, she proposes a "holistic approach towards orientation." Through it, she highlights that the areas of orientation and the orientation skills of living beings can only be analytically distinguished, not really separated from one another. This is because orientation encompasses the entire interaction of a living being with its world. It is not an additional achievement of cognition such as thinking and perception, as Kant still assumed, but a basic ability of living in a world.

Because we cannot orient ourselves well from the outset, the author's next step is to (analytically) distinguish between "natural" and "taught" orientation. In the natural orientation which is mostly unconscious and automatic she includes the sense of balance, the majority of corporeal movements including what we call our sense of body, homeostasis, digestion, and eating and sleeping rhythms. They are all part of human and animal orientation and conditions for the functioning of all others. We only become aware of them when they are disrupted.

This is why it is difficult to distinguish between natural and taught orientation. For instance, physical pain indicates a disorder in our body, making us aware of it in a natural way. However, as soon as you talk about it, this can change the pain. According to Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 244), talking about pain (e.g., instead of crying like a baby) teaches us a "new pain-behavior." And even animals, which obviously also feel pain and

try to tackle its causes, but to which we do not attribute consciousness, in their individual lives and over long periods of time through the evolution of their species learn to better orient themselves and can far surpass human orientation in certain areas.

Human beings certainly have far more opportunities to learn in their orientation: in a short time through their own experiences that they keep in memory, over many years through education by parents and teachers, through social (cultural, moral, religious, political) training and conditioning and increasingly through technical tools. Reva explains this clearly and in detail. She also shows that there are a lot of leeways in which decisions can and must be made in our orientation. For Reva, this opens up a comprehensive area of care and selfcare, trust and mistrust. However, there are also leeways in dealing with the rules, norms and laws through which societies try to organize their lives and give them a secure orientation. Even the sciences must always reckon with cognitive biases.

Reva's broad concept of crisis leads her to consider, for example, Albert Camus's works *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* as descriptions of existential crises. These would not be temporary, but enduring crises. Reva also counts Alzheimer's disease, which can permanently destroy personal orientation, or drug and alcohol problems among the crisis phenomena, as well as traumatic experiences or a lack of personal self-confidence. Since crises of this kind, if you want to call them that, always affect a person's entire orientation, Reva has not even to ask the question of how to cope with multiple crises or polycrises.

In a second part, she documents the new outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to show how personal and media perspectives on temporally and spatially limited experiences of a crisis permeate and influence each other. Here she makes clear the perspectivity of all orientations through a protocol of opposing views on the same event – the release of two Israeli hostages by Hamas on October 23, 2023. In this way, she shows how different types of orientations (psychological, ethical, economic, political, religious and critical) and their crises are interconnected in the face of a major real threat. The stories of those directly involved are in turn reflected in the press reports of the Israeli *Jerusalem Post* and the Arab *Al-Jazeera*. This is concrete orientation research at its best.

In her contribution *Orientation Needs in Crises – from a Psychological and Philosophical Perspective*, Natalia Hartinger also focuses on personal orientation

and crisis management. She finds the psychological perspective elaborated in the motivational theory developed by Abraham Harold Maslow in the 1940s. She unites the two perspectives in a revealing way, starting from a narrower and more defined concept of crisis: "Crises present unique challenges that compel individuals and groups to reorient themselves." More concretely, this means: "Crises disrupt established routines and fixed beliefs and simultaneously create opportunities for fresh beginnings, new orientations, and the development of entirely novel moral frameworks." And as a result: "Crises are situations of sudden disorientation, and global crises can be defined as situations of simultaneous unsettlement and disorientation affecting large groups of people."

With Maslow, Hartinger looks at the decision-making processes in personal crises and the "motives" that drive the reorientations. According to Maslow, "human navigation is predominantly guided by presently prevailing needs, driving individuals to act in ways that either satisfy these needs or mitigate perceived threats to those needs." Maslow establishes a rank order among these needs: *need for safety – need for love and belonging – need for esteem – need for self-actualization*. In addition, he distinguishes between *deficiency-focused needs* and *growth-oriented needs*. In a related way, the philosophy of orientation describes a sequence of entering individual, inter-individual, social and global worlds of orientation, between which there are attention thresholds that are only crossed on behalf of specific needs and occasions. As a rule, we always start from our individual world of orientation with its routines and assessments, simply because we first have to get to grips with our own lives. Maslow sees it the similar way.

With regard to human orientation as a whole, Hartinger outlines "principles for effective orientation": *acknowledging the bound capacity of orientation, comprehending individual needs, giving time some time, embracing uncertainty, broadening perspectives, innovating orientation, coping with distress and uncertainty and embracing sovereign orientation*. Sovereign orientation is, in the philosophy of orientation, opposed to self-actualization in Maslow's theory of human motivation: for sure, one's orientation in one's natural and social world is also about one's self-actualization, but more about getting along with other people's needs for self-actualization with whom one has to deal. This constantly causes conflicts and establishes rank orders of a different kind: between superior and inferior orientations in respective relations and situations. From a realistic view, we experience that humans do not only seek familiarity and comfort, as Maslow supposes, and enjoy legal and moral norms, but also want to distinguish

ourselves from each other, overcome each other and try to utilize rules to our own advantage. Maslow himself also had in mind the self-actualization of outstanding and successful, but also prudent, far-sighted and respectful personalities, who better manage than others to overcome crises and create a stable and certain orientation for entire societies, including global society.

In view of the global crises we are currently facing, most people would like to see such orientation guides in government. They are also most likely to be able to transform deficiency-focused needs into growth-oriented needs. Of course, this again creates political problems: in the midst of political crises, populations tend to weigh up democratic against autocratic forms of government, which we are increasingly witnessing. But even within democratic forms of government, superior people in terms of orientation are needed for mastering difficult situations of the country.

Hartinger does not go into detail on the question of coping with multiple crises. Instead, she provides helpful psychological recommendations: "A nuanced understanding of individual needs, combined with an awareness of the orientation process — including subconscious routines, cognitive shortcuts, footholds, leeways, and the inherent potential for disorientation — can alleviate decision-making stress and positively shape future perspectives." Also for her, this puts a positive spin on crisis management: "Crises, rather than being merely disruptive, should be understood as mobilizing forces that drive societal progress."

With his contribution *Overview of Historical Polycrises – A Comparative Analysis of Their Causes and Ways of Overcoming Them*, Dirk Stemper enters the historical dimension, in two senses: first, he "explores crises' historical and philosophical dimensions, proposing a framework for orientation rooted in lessons drawn from historical polycrises," then he recommends the "tentative thinking" of the churchman and philosopher Nicholas of Cues (1401-1465) who had to manage multiple difficult crises during the ending Middle Ages. The transition from the Middle Ages to modern times is considered the greatest upheaval in Western thought and was also reflected in profound philosophical reorientations. Nicholas' reorientation preceded that of René Descartes (1596-1650) by two hundred years; in between there was the great reorientations of the Italian Renaissance, the new natural sciences (Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo), Francis Bacon's *Novum Organon* (1561-1626) and Michel de Montaigne's decisively

personal orientation (1533-1592). All of them pursued a perspectivization, specification and individualization of human orientation and its solution from the Christian faith.

Stemper's concept of crisis is similar to Hartinger's. His key words are: specific, unexpected and non-routine events – high levels of uncertainty – threat or perceived threat to high-priority goals – extreme discrepancy between desired and existing states – elementary disorientation challenging our understanding of the world and our place in it. A polycrisis then is a "macro-crisis resulting from concurrent, interrelated breakdowns in numerous global systems." Stemper adds features of non-linear thinking: bifurcations in midst of linear developments, points of decision for alternative ways, changes from self-dampening to self-reinforcing causal loops that make events unpredictable. Above all, Stemper creates helpful overviews that are essential for orientation. From his overviews on selected historical polycrises such as wars, famines, and pandemics around the world he gains as general lessons:

– "Economic disruption feeds political instability, creating social unrest and a feedback loop that amplifies the original economic challenges."
– "Unlike catastrophes with clear beginning and end points, polycrises often develop gradually and persist through multiple phases."
– "Contemporaries fail to recognize polycrises as unified phenomena and rahter tend to experience them as separate, unrelated catastrophes."

Crises often only gradually are recognized; it takes time to move "from fragmented to new frameworks and systemic understandings." But persistent crises urge people to "adopt novel solutions and new social norms, practices and technological innovations and to create new institutional forms." In science and philosophy, they trigger to develop "more resilient systems, holistic response strategies and cross-cutting collaborations, open for social and cultural adaptation." They require leaders who are able to orient people on the crucial factors of causing and overcoming the current (poly)crisis, in this way to master it and maintain vision and hope.

Stemper draws on Nicholas of Cues because he lived through a time of great political instability, social unrest, and religious conflict and at the same time sought, found and proposed great solutions concerning the polycrisis to those in power. He was an undogmatic spiritual diplomat, an important Church politician and reformer, who at times courageously opposed the Pope, and a

bishop who also had to fight militarily for the survival of his diocese from which he had to live. He fought for the reunion of the Eastern and Western churches; he participated in the discussions surrounding the Hussite negotiations; he established an endowment for a hospital in Cues for the poor; intermediately he was a Curial Cardinal. So he knew the world very well, also in political and economic terms, and was experienced in managing multiple crises.

Even if he only achieved limited results with his concrete proposals, he found a still interesting and convincing approach to deal with crises and the reorientations they require. His doctrines of "*docta ignorantia* (learned ignorance)" and "*coniectura* (conjecture)" lead, as Stemper calls it, to a "tentative thinking" that replaces the search for absolute certainties. For a man of the church, this was both strange and evident: strange because the Christian religion promised absolute certainty, evident because it paradoxically claimed to trust in a God from whom everything was to be comprehended, but who himself cannot been comprehended. Starting from this, you must humbly be content with assumptions. However, Nicholas recognized that you can experiment with your assumptions, keep them in flux and exchange them. We do the same in our orientation today. The paradoxical *docta ignorantia* is, according to Stemper, a never-ending "self-irritation in thinking through which our orientation can create and control alternatives." – "It encourages us to listen to diverse viewpoints and engage in constructive dialog, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect." Nicholas deeply needed this kind of thinking when mediating between the conflicting church parties and proposing new institutional structures. According to Stemper, it is "perfectly applicable in the context of polycrises."

The paradox of the incomprehensibility of God from whom all is to be comprehended leaves behind the paradox of the incomprehensibility of time in which all is to be comprehended. Time cannot be grasped logically because this leads us into a logical circle: when we determine and calculate time, it is itself already passing; if we say 'now,' another now has already occurred; as Aristotle noted, 'now' is always the same and always different, i.e., paradoxical. Augustine therefore wrote that we can easily deal with time, but if we are asked what time is, we cannot say. For God, however, there is no time, for him everything is present. But because situations continuously change over time, we have to continuously reorient ourselves and we get into crises when

situations change so much that we lose our overview and control, becoming unsure of what we have to do.

Disorientation can give rise to fear and despair, making it even more difficult to find a new orientation. And then you risk falling back on simple political, moral or religious convictions, i.e., already established doctrines that you don't have to answer for yourself. Such doctrines can provide support, but they are not tailored to the respective situation whose problems we have to solve now. They may reassure us, but they do not lead us any further. Instead, we can only rely on our own orientation skills and have to make our own decisions in and on our new situations on the basis of new footholds that will lead us forward in these situations. These new decisions can affect everything we have held on to so far, not only our pragmatic beliefs, but also our political, moral, religious and, last not least, philosophical convictions. More than ever, we require a "tentative thinking," especially in crises and polycrises.

We should take tentative decisions through careful consideration, prudence, foresight and confidence, the main virtues of orientation. But these considerations also take time; and crisis situations that trigger fear and despair create time pressure to overcome them. Decisions therefore have to be made quickly, which is why we usually look to people who have proven their superiority in terms of orientation and at the same time enjoy a high level of trust. We must and can trust that people who have demonstrated a superior sense of orientation by mastering difficult situations will also master the new situation. They will do their best if they exchange ideas with others who own similar orientation skills and make the upcoming and often very difficult decisions in consultation with them. Individual people can hardly take responsibility for decisions with global consequences; otherwise they would be like gods. Complex structures of decision-making are necessary, which, despite all the well-known difficulties, democracies are still best able to provide. And in a democracy, all orientation skills of all individuals are relevant; in order to solve diverse crises, their diversity is also indispensable. Once the crises have been successfully overcome, we speak of a new era.

Co-orientation is the keyword for Yuri Di Liberto in his contribution *From Disorientation to Scientific Co-Orientation.* Like all other authors he borrows the framework for his structural analysis of the crisis management from the philosophy of orientation. He looks in particular at our current major crises such

as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, climate change and Russia's war against Ukraine. He tries to identify footholds that trigger crisis awareness, the foregrounds and backgrounds that play a role, the differences in the perception of crises in small and large groups and what leads to action in a crisis. In all of this, he emphasizes the time-dependency of orientation, the importance of broadening horizons in the perception of crises and the unavoidable restriction of horizons in overcoming them. But he also incorporates many other points of view from the fields of psychoanalysis, critical economic theories and the social epistemologies of scientific activities. The result is a differentiated and realistic picture of multiple crises and the possibilities of overcoming them.

Among the relevant authors he names Winfried Georg Sebald (1944-2001), an award-winning German writer who emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he became a professor at the University of East Anglia. In *On the Natural History of Destruction* (in German *Luftkrieg und Literatur*) from 1999, he dealt with how the effect of the American-British air raids on major German cities during the Second World War was portrayed in literature. Hating the German postwar novel "like pestilence," he wanted to show what kinds of collective and individual defense mechanisms were active in order to deal with the unimaginable destruction. There was a surprising "collective agreement of silence" or "silent fascination." The most surprising thing was to observe a woman cleaning the windows of a building that stood alone and undamaged in the middle of the desert of ruins and others drinking coffee and listening to a gramophone on their well-tended balcony, amidst the ruins. Thus, one way to endure the situation may be to carry on or, "through an acting-out normality, to bestow normality in an abnormal situation." In terms of the philosophy of orientation, routines are recalled even where all routines are lost. This may be possible and usual in the current crises, too.

This observation is supported by the psychologist Sally Weintrobe with her *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis: Neoliberal Exceptionalism and the Culture of Uncare* (2021). She points out that in heavy crises not negation, but disavowal prevails: not saying 'no,' but rather 'it may be true, but does not matter.' One tries to consider a dreadful crisis as just not relevant in one's situation. This anew makes clear that orientation (both individual and social) ever includes evaluations and revaluations besides observations.

Rob Nixon, a young South African author, demonstrates in his *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) that crises like the environmental

one may be "too slow to be seen." Then they typically are not viewed as violence at all or as too far away from oneself to consider them dreadful for oneself.

For realizing crises, you need certain patterns in your orientation. This elaborates the psychologist James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (2015) whom Di Liberto cites as well. Gibson calls such shapes and patterns "affordances": they immediately give meaning for action.

According to Di Liberto, there is a dialectic between freely orienting oneself and the "cogency or necessitation of particular orientation systems." This dialectic is subjected to historical conditions and must be abbreviated (in terms of the philosophy of orientation) for the current time. In the current crises, Di Liberto argues, democracy is also part of it, aligning here to Max Horkheimer's critique of subjective reason. In addition, he also argues in favor of including "hierarchical power" in the considerations for overcoming crises, here with reference to Blair Fix's, Shimshon Bichler's and Jonathan Nitzan's "Ecological limits and hierarchical power" from 2019, who postulate: "hierarchical power is a means of harnessing more energy."

At least, Di Liberto wants to rely on science as the excellent mode of co-orientation in the age of multiple crises: "co-orientation means *cooperatively* orientating ourselves and orienting ourselves towards what is *common* between us." First, co-orientation is orientation through others' orientation which appears in common elementary plausibilities. By them, more refined co-orientations through logical procedures and specific methods are supported. In this way, global systems of scientific orientation are created that are based on rigorous controls and continue to self-adjust themselves. Yet, though scientific discourse allows most of disciplined co-orientation, the scientific community is a relatively small community; it is dispersed both local and global; it involves a lot of diverse methods and 'positions,' and, according to Thomas S. Kuhn, it also undergoes changes of its paradigms from time to time. So, scientific co-orientation will certainly and largely help to master the current global crises. But it will be not sufficient either. Beyond the scientific co-orientation there aren't strict rules and controls for our everyday, moral and political orientation. But here it is decided on whose expertise is involved.

Our book is concluded by a strong philosophical position and a firm political recommendation, Tomáš Korda's *Trust in the Rationality of Ongoing Processes and Increased Use of Nuclear Energy*. His proposal is to tackle two of the major

crises at the same time: today's mistrust also in scientific knowledge and the avoidance of CO_2 emissions, which are warming the earth to such an extent that our natural living conditions are being destroyed. The two are closely linked: The supply of energy through nuclear fission or nuclear fusion is a product of the most elaborate science; its conditions and possibilities have been reliably researched to date; it can be used technically, is economically profitable and its use is independent of political ideologies. So, according to Korda, it helps to trust in the rationality of nature itself, and from this trust he concludes: "The environmental crisis […] underscores that humanity's basic interaction with nature need not be abandoned—only enhanced and radicalized." For him, it is about to "redirect the debate from questioning humanity's instrumental relationship with nature as such to interrogating how effectively technologies exploit it." His argument is: the production of nuclear energy has the least impact on nature and is therefore preferable. To Korda, this also seems compatible with Martin Heidegger's sharp rejection of all technical exploitation of nature.

Obviously, this is a resolute abbreviation of the problems and possible solutions in the current polycrisis: nuclear energy, which has been scientifically well researched, also has its dangers, as everyone knows, and creates new problems, above all the easy military vulnerability and the storage of nuclear waste. However, as this example highlights, the problems are perceived very differently in different countries, so that some especially promote nuclear energy, while others firmly reject it. The sciences themselves provide very good predictions in certain areas, so that they are strongly trusted; but in other areas they are very controversial, especially in ecology. Philosophically, we can no longer expect absolute certainties anywhere and must instead rely on our own orientation to weigh up the valence of certainties in different areas and on different issues. This, in turn, can largely be regarded as a scientific consensus.

Indeed, Tomáš Korda recommends his proposals in a highly reflected way. He also discusses the alternative of "denialism," referring to Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (2001). He respects the interconnectedness of the crises and the fundamental uncertainty and instability in the interactions of governments. Nevertheless, he insists that now, in the midst of major crises, something must be done to prevent the crises from getting out of hand. The emergency itself forces us to act and to act together in a way that everyone can easily agree on. Here, Korda takes his cue from a statesman like Henry Kissinger, who, like few others, learned how to move

confidently in the complex web of international interests, being able to make clear political recommendations, and from the younger political scientist John J. C. Mearsheimer, who assumes as realistically as possible that in the anarchic international system every great power strives to become even more powerful for its own security and to keep its opponents down. A peaceful international balance of power cannot be expected in the long term either. Mearsheimer calls this "the tragedy of great power politics." Francis Fukuyama's (and formerly Kant's) idea of *the End of History* in a peaceful global democracy and commerce has proven to be naïve.

Certainly, according to Korda, we must also keep our distance from scientific knowledge and remain suspicious of it in a kind of "reflected trust," as recommended by the philosophy of orientation. But when all orientation wavers and disorientation spreads, we will still rely on the best knowledge we have, and that is, in a global horizon, still scientific knowledge and the technical tools that we owe to it. Here, Korda refers to a sentence by his compatriot Franz Kafka, who was extremely skeptical of the rationality of the world and yet said: "In the fight between you and the world, back the world." In actual philosophical terms, for Korda the rationality of the world does not lie *behind* its appearances, but *in* its appearances: "Rather than projecting rationality behind appearances, our task is to recognize rationality as the very fabric of the situation."

Above all, Korda also believes in the hope that our orientation skills will continue to develop as the experience of orientation grows. You have to trust in human orientation itself in order to be able to act at all.

FIRST PART:
TAKING STOCK

I.

Crises in the Personal Environment and Ways of Overcoming Them

by Nataliia Reva, Ukraine

Abstract: The author insists that the concept of orientation, encompassing both natural instincts and learned capacities, serves as a foundational mechanism for making sense of the world and acting within it. Crises, in a broad or narrow sense, disrupt these mechanisms, demanding adaptation to restore stability of the overall orientation – the system composed of natural and taught Orientations. The paper explores the interconnectedness of orientation types, highlighting how instability in one domain can cascade into broader disorientation and how one type of orientation can come to aid another to preserve the integrity of the overall system. The author argues in favor of a holistic approach towards orientation, highlighting the necessity of a stable orientation framework to respond effectively to the complex challenges of a world in crisis. Ultimately, the paper studies the example of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, showing the complex interplay between overall orientation and crisis.

1. Orientation as a Philosophical Problem

Orientation is a topic unreasonably neglected by philosophy. In a more general sense, it is often seen as auxiliary to refer to the direction or alignment of something, whether physical, moral, or intellectual. Many philosophical inquiries that deal with human existence, consciousness, ethics, and thinking involve the idea of orientation in various forms without explicitly using the term itself.

Werner Stegmaier's project of a philosophy of orientation intends to correct this thematic omission of the past. Stegmaier brings orientation to the fore, making it the central concept of his philosophical investigations. For him, orientation is not an additional gear or tool that people use when necessary, but a skill and natural ability that is always present (without our will) and helps humans to survive daily. Stegmaier indicates that orientation involves finding paths both in the terrain and through all the circumstances of human life: not only our daily life but even our survival depends on the success of our orientation.[1]

Within this paper, I expect to further expand Stegmaier's ideas on the concept of orientation and organize them into one structure regarding the daily (not only) crises that arise in our lives. To properly do so, we should start by clarifying its meaning. It was brought into philosophical discussion as a correspondence to the decisive state of pondering at the "crossroad," comparing the chances and risks of possible alternatives.[2]

However, Stegmaier insists that the concept of orientation is much richer than simple decision-making, and it is not solemnly a human feature. Animals also possess this ability "to-orient-themselves." Some orientation tools are naturally placed on them by evolution, like echolocation in bats and dolphins and pheromone trails that ants leave; others are taught. For instance, a tiger can learn the shortest path to the water source and if it is blocked for any reason, the animal can reorient its path to get to the water in the second shortest way. Some of the orientation skills are controversial and hard to classify. Scientists still cannot say with certainty if the migration of birds or turtles is a genetically transmitted knowledge or that the youngers learn the path and the ability to self-orient along their way from the oldest members of the group. Nevertheless, we can analogically presuppose the presence of the same two categories in human orientation: natural and taught.

1.1. Natural Orientation

Natural orientation is an embodied ability that one is born with, cannot survive without and cannot get rid of, even if one wants to. In other words, it is a "pre-programmed" orientation in us evolutionally by nature or placed by God if you believe in one. Since it is firmly embodied, it is solely individual, always within

1 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. XI.
2 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 103.

us, and depends on our senses. Natural Orientation can be both conscious and unconscious. I'll give some examples later in the text. There are three types: (1) *Time* is connected to the natural rhythms of one's organism; (2) *spatial orientation* is represented by the dichotomy of "up" and "down," the feeling of the space around our body (what Kant might call feeling for the two sides) and the presence of the horizon; (3) *biological preconditions* of one's body.

Let us briefly dwell on each type now, starting with time. We must note that we are not talking about clock time or calendar orientation. Natural time is the one that depends directly on our biology. For instance, digestion and nutrient absorption follow daily patterns. You can have a habit of having breakfast at 7 a.m. and lunch at noon. By then, your body will signal that "it's time for a bite." You don't need a clock to figure it out. Another example is the sleep-wake cycle. Regular bedtime and wake-up times are essential for the young children. The amount of sleep for adults can vary depending on age, lifestyle, genetics, and overall health, but typically, if you have a stable "sleep-wake-routine" of going to bed by 11 p.m. and waking up at 8 a.m. each day, you don't need an alarm clock to remind you of both of these things, your inner clock will do it for you.

Regarding spatial orientation, Immanuel Kant found it to be the primary ability for the subjective ground of differentiation, laying the basis for any geographical one, the faculty of making distinctions through the feeling of "right" and "left," implanted by nature but made habitual through frequent practice.[3] I will dare to disagree. Humans feel space around their bodies and sense things from both sides, sometimes even those behind, but only "up" and "down" remain unchanged. Even if you decide from now on to walk only on your hands, the "up" and "down" won't turn with your body because it is unnatural. While "right" and "left," "in front" and "behind" are not naturally fixed and change with all the turns of your body. As Stegmaier points out, the body's physique and stance have no pre-established directionality.[4]

Both spatial and temporal natural orientation are determined by our *biology*. Nevertheless, since space and time are not the only factors naturally influencing our orientation, I find it crucial to feature biology apart. Humans generally orient themselves via senses. We can hear someone coming from the back; we can smell the gas leak, and we can feel the cold, but only in that

3 See Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?," p. 9.
4 See Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?," p. 9.

case if all our senses work accurately. Some people are born blind or may lose their sight during their lives. If this happens, they must orient with the help of other senses which compensate for the lack of vision. David Goldreich's studies showed that deaf people can possess a "superior touch" because the part of their auditory cortex, instead of staying unused, is redirected to the sense of touch.[5] The brain adapts to the given conditions to help ease the orientation process and increase our chances of survival.

Our body is a highly intelligent part of who we are. Without our conscious control, it always tries to keep homeostasis, adjusting to changing external conditions. Another crucial sense that goes completely unnoticed by people that we tend to forget about is a sense of balance. Without it, we won't be able to walk, stand or sit. It directly depends on an even bigger sense – proprioception – the sense of your proper body. Without proprioception, we would lose total control over our body and become "a mind in a jar" able to think, imagine, and fantasize, but completely incapable of moving any member, talk and even eat. People with sensory neuropathy syndrome need to focus all their attention on their hand or leg to make it move. Every simplest action asks for unthinkable efforts and concentration from them. In normal conditions, both the proprioception and the sense of balance literally help us move forward every single day and, what is more important for this paper, release our attention to orient and deal with other challenges beyond our body.

On the contrary the sense of pain was developed by our body to attract our attention. It is highly important for our survival. When we feel pain, our body sends a signal to our brain that we need to orient ourselves to the problem, the place where it hurts. People who suffer from congenital insensitivity to pain are at a higher risk of getting hurt and even dying (from bleeding or inner bone fractures, for instance) because they do not feel (and, therefore, know) that something is wrong with them. Pain is an important marker that protects us from harm. Aristotle believed it (together with pleasure) to be a "passion of the soul," but Sir Charles Scott Sherrington proved that pain is an essential sense of the human body "rooted" into our nervous system.

The last thing that should be noted about senses is that they all work in unison, as a team, substituting each other as needed. Therefore, when we talk of the presence of the horizon as an essential marker for our spatial orientation,

5 See Higgins, *Sentient*, p. 93.

such a horizon should not be understood as a far limit of our vision but in a broader sense as a limit of the activity of all our sense organs, the edges of space that wraps the body. Our body as the center of our horizon is a primary standpoint and, as Stegmaier calls it, an absolute orientation we can neither adopt nor abandon.[6] Since we are situated in this world as a particular body, we cannot help but orient ourselves by using its capacities by the influence of its conscious and unconscious senses.

1.2. Taught Orientation

Taught Orientation is a kind of orientation we receive from the outside via experience and specific knowledge. Therefore, it could be either individual or mutual. We both share basic mathematics knowledge or the grammar of our native language, which allows us to interact daily. However, our vocabulary and its richness can vary depending on a person's professional specialization, literacy and common knowledge. Most of the time taught orientation requires using some supportive gear or gadget. Unlike natural orientation, it is always conscious and case-based, brought into light by ourselves on purpose to resolve some problem. As Stegmaier puts it, orientation means dealing with relevant contingencies.[7]

Let us start with *individual (personal) taught orientation*. It includes the following types: (1) *Time* – orientation with the use of calendar or clock measures; (2) *geographical* – our ability to orient in place, especially unfamiliar locations, with or without assisting devices and equipment; (3) *moral / Ethical / cultural / juridical* – orientation based on a personal moral compass, cultivated ethical instructions, and individual adherence to cultural and legal norms and laws; (4) *political / ideological / religious* – orientation based on an individual political preferences and views, support of a certain ideology (may be influenced by a propaganda), and religious beliefs; (5) *critical (scientific, economical, linguistic, technological, media)* - orientation based on our knowledge (scientific, economical, linguistic, digital, etc.) and critical thinking; (6) *psychological* – personal orientation based on psychological (pre)conditions; (7) *orientation toward the future* – an individual psychological orientation expressed in one's worldview, mindset, and perspective regarding future events, goals, and expectations.

6 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 45.
7 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 26.

Talking about time, as taught orientation, we appeal to our ability to use such tools as a calendar and clock to orient. This taught temporal orientation is also tightly connected with the orientation toward the future. Goal setting, financial and life planning, medical preparation (for surgery, for instance), personal growth, etc. – all of them require a clear time perspective – the ability to draw the line from "now" to some "fixed future." As Stegmaier underlines, "the past and the future are, respectively, the horizons of the decided and the decidable, while the present is the time for making decisions".[8] Orientation toward the future is a type of psychological orientation that deserves to be indicated separately because of its particular and highly important role in the life of every person without exception.

Talking about individual psychological orientation in general, this is an orientation towards one's own *self* – choosing what is the best for you, what approaches you to your goals, suits your desires, etc. Self-orientation is crucial for our personal survival. A person who does not have a sense of self-preservation lives fast and dies young. The idea that self-preservation is one of the most fundamental and primary instincts in all living organisms. From an evolutionary perspective, this instinct has evolved over millions of years as a survival strategy. Meanwhile, neuroscience has identified the neural pathways that are associated with the fight-or-flight response, the key component of human self-preservation. Nevertheless, I attribute it to the learned skills of individual psychological orientation since people do not come to this world knowing from the start what death is and what might kill them. Death and fear are the concepts that we learn during our lifetime.

Another trait related to self-preservation and an integral part of self-orientation is self-care. It involves taking steps to maintain physical, emotional, and mental well-being and requires such skills as self-awareness, self-reflection, self-empowerment, and self-compassion. Moreover, a healthy self-orientation needs a harmonic individual's self-identity, which includes their gender identity, cultural identity, and other aspects of their self-concept. It involves acknowledging your own unique characteristics and experiences and knowing how to deal with them (accepting yourself). Harmonic self-identity positively influences one's own orientation by fostering emotional resilience (making people better equipped to handle stress and setbacks and adjust easier to changing circumstances and

8 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 60.

navigate transitions), encouraging the establishment and maintenance of healthy boundaries, boosting greater life satisfaction, building healthy relationships, assisting more effective and pleasant communication, and so on.

Another psychological condition that affects orientation is the feeling of trust. In our everyday lives, we trust strangers much more often than we think: we trust the bus driver that he will drive us safely home after an exhausting day of work; we trust the restaurant that the rabbit we order with wine won't turn out to be a cat; we trust our employer that they will pay us on time; we trust teachers at school that they will teach our children science and not conspiracy theories, and so on. Yet, if a teacher, for example, fails our expectations, we become more skeptical towards all teachers, willing to control and check what kind of information they give to our kids. It takes time to rebuild the trust in teachers and what Niklas Luhmann called a "trust in trust" – certainty in your own skills in dealing with trust by distinguishing who's worthy to be trusted and who's not.[9] In the same way functions our trust in some beliefs, knowledge, and values. We take them for granted until they are successfully working for us, as Stegmaier points out, a necessity of life that one is able to rely on without any further footholds or reasons.[10]

Let us pursue geographical orientation. Nowadays, it is chiefly digitalized. With a smartphone in hand and a good internet connection, there are really rare cases that we truly feel (physically) lost. These technologies have transformed the way we perceive, interact with, and navigate the physical world. Online mapping services like Google Maps provide detailed (often real-time) information about locations, traffic conditions, public transportation, and any other points of interest, like Starbucks' opening hours. Many mobile apps and services use location-based data to provide personalized information. For example, users can find nearby restaurants, stores, available taxis, or events based on their current location. On the one hand, the advent of these technologies made people's orientation easier in many ways; on the other, it created new challenges, especially among the older generation.[11]

Moral, ethical, cultural, and juridical orientations I have grouped together because they all "lean on" some assigned norms and values. Moral and ethical orientations are significantly interrelated concepts that are often

9 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 134.
10 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 133.
11 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 255.

used interchangeably in our daily lives. However, if there were no difference, there would not be two terms. Moral orientation often refers to an individual's personal values and principles of what is right and wrong that are rooted in a person's sense of morality. The strongest foothold of it is inner coercion.[12] This sense can be influenced and cultivated by cultural, religious, and individual factors, but it is always individual. On the contrary, ethical orientation is guided by some external ethical frameworks with its own principles and codes of conduct. These frameworks may be established by professional organizations, institutions, society, etc., and every one personally chooses to follow them or ignore them. A quick example to illustrate this difference: one person has a deep internal sense of honesty and therefore never lies; another person was told by his firm that giving false information to either his employer or clients will result in immediate dismissal and thus restrains from lying at least at work. Both try to be sincere and honest, but their motives and the cause of the restriction are completely different.

Cultural orientation refers to an individual's familiarity and alignment with the values, customs, beliefs, and practices of a particular cultural group of which a person is a part. In addition to ethical orientation, it has external stimuli, and sometimes, it can adjust to more than one of them. Even in one society, a person can have multiple cultural identities. For example, being an American, a Chicago Bulls fan and a biker simultaneously. This flexibility makes a cultural orientation a complex system encompassing various dimensions, like cultural traditions, routines, norms and values, cultural identities and, specifically important in our time, multicultural adaptability in our culturally diverse world. This trait helps effectively adjust to and thrive in it. It begins with an open and respectful attitude (cultivated through education, cinema, literature, and so on) toward people from different cultures by appreciating their richness and valuing diversity in general.

At last, individual juridical orientation implies an individual's familiarity with legal principles, rights, responsibilities, and the legal system as a whole. Sometimes, it is also called individual legal awareness. It is crucial that people know their constitutional rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, and protection against discrimination, and be able to advocate for them. On the other hand, as Stegmaier highlights, legal awareness opens the possibility

12 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 206.

to freely interpret and implement the rules in life according to the situation – gives the leeway regarding laws, prescriptions, and regulations[13] - instead of strictly following all that is established. Sometimes, we can allow ourselves to break some minor laws, like crossing the street at a red light or speeding on an empty highway at night, but we should remember the possible consequences. Similarly, not knowing the laws neither responsibility nor protects us from the legal implications of our actions and decisions.

The same principle unites political, ideological and religious orientations. They all depend on a person's affiliation with a particular political, ideological, or religious group. Individual worldviews and belief systems are shaped by the direct influence of these groups and the values and ideas that are shared. These orientations can intersect and overlap in various ways. For example, some political ideologies are closely linked to religious beliefs, and religious organizations may have political influence. However, while there are commonalities, it's also important to recognize that these orientations are distinct from one another. Political orientation is primarily concerned with governance and societal organization, ideological orientation pertains to a specific set of ideas or beliefs, and religious orientation focuses on spiritual and religious beliefs. People may prioritize one of these orientations over the others or integrate them into a comprehensive worldview.

Under critical orientation, I mean an individual competence to orient with the help of critical thinking skills and knowledge a person has. It can be applied to various fields, such as science, economics, linguistics, media, and technology, but is not exhausted by them. Let us take science as an example. Critical orientation can assess the existing theories and paradigms with the goal of identifying shortcomings, biases, and areas for improvement. At the same time, in our everyday lives, the scientific knowledge that we acquire helps us critically understand the world, solve problems, make considered decisions, and effectively orient ourselves in general. For instance, one of the crucial aspects of science is empirical inquiry. Through it, the scientific mindset encourages individuals to gather evidence, evaluate it objectively, and base their conclusions on observable facts rather than subjective experiences. Thus, critical thinking skills encourages individuals to question assumptions, challenge existing beliefs, and approach problems with an open and inquisitive mind.

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13 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 180.

Let us proceed to *mutual taught Orientation*. It has almost the same types as the previous one: (1) *ethical / cultural / juridical* – orientation of the group based on cultivated in the society ethical, cultural and legal regulations; (2) *political / ideological / religious* – orientation of a society of the followers of a particular party/ideology, or a religious community; (3) *Communicative* - orientation based on intersubjective interaction; (4) *technological* – orientation of the masses via technologies; (5) *economical* – orientation of the masses based or economic general tendencies; (6) *psychological* – orientation of the masses based on psychological preconditions; (7) *orientation toward the future* – mutual psychological orientation based on the individual one.

Both lists that I have presented here above are limited to the types of orientation that I could define and argue, but I do not claim their exhaustiveness. The major difference of mutual orientation is the presence of others that affect Individual Orientation. As Stegmaier points out, encountering other people creates new situations of orientation.[14] Depending on who is this Other, Mutual Orientation can be further divided into three categories (using Stegmaier's terms): (1) *inter-individual or communal orientation* – orientation in your primary circle – those people with whom you communicate on a daily basis; (2) *societal orientation* – orientation of a society you live in; (3) *global or world orientation* – orientation that becomes possible through digitalization and globalization.

Since ethical, cultural, and juridical orientations are externally imposed and require the presence of a community that recognizes the same values and principles, it is appropriate to talk about them on the interpersonal and societal levels. Mutual ethical orientation promotes a culture of trust, mutual respect, integrity, and ethical excellence towards others. At the same time, it also implies the necessity of collective and social responsibility. Meanwhile, mutual cultural orientation aims to bridge gaps between various cultures and help interact conflict-free in multicultural settings. A key element is exchanging cultural knowledge, ideas, and practices. Therefore, cultural education is important. In turn, mutual juridical orientation expects a common commitment to legal norms and a shared understanding and respect for legal principles, rights, and responsibilities. Thanks to the mutual juridical orientation, we can keep trust in the society we live in, believing that people around us will avoid engaging in activities that may violate the law (and hurt us personally). All of these

14 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 111.

orientations share the hope of reciprocity. If you prioritize acting in an ethical and morally responsible manner within the bounds of the law, you expect people to do the same. If they do not meet your expectations, your internal feeling of trust towards society can stumble.

As was said before, political, ideological, and religious orientations work within a particular group. Apart from the collective worldviews, all of them also require common practices. For example, politically engaged members take voting seriously, watch political debates, follow the news, read political analytics, and then discuss them with each other. Religious orientation presupposes that believers educate themselves with sacred texts, participate in religious services, rituals, and worship practices, follow taboos (like religious fasting, halal or kosher food), and so on. Some proactive followers can be involved in community service activities, such as volunteering, charity work, and even becoming missionaries. In turn, ideological groups may organize common reading and studying of foundational texts or literature associated with their ideology, organize rallies and pickets, and provoke philosophical debates. What is essential is that being part of a group with mutual orientations can empower individuals to take action on issues they care about and allow individuals to advocate collectively for their shared beliefs and objectives, amplifying their voices. Such joint actions and common purpose provide a sense of solidarity, enabling like-minded individuals to work together effectively toward shared goals. Such empowerment can lead to increased civic engagement, activism, religious devotion, and, in the worst case, even war.

Communicative orientation is probably the most frequently used type of orientation in everyday life. It encompasses how people perceive and engage in various forms of communication, including verbal and non-verbal interaction, listening, and information sharing. Thus, it deeply depends on individual skills but flourishes only in the presence of at least one other person. Communication is never one-sided. Even if only one person is presenting a monologue, they need the other to listen and reflect on what was said. Suppose the presenter expresses similar ideas to ours. In that case, we confirm our orientation, but if they contradict our views, communication can unsettle it, forcing us to find new footholds and reorient. Sometimes, when the views are too bipolar, and both sides are willing to keep hold of their orientation, it can provoke a severe conflict. The ways people approach conflict and disagreement, give and

receive feedback or constructive criticism, and strive to understand the other are significant parts of their communicative orientation as well.

Talking of a group's technological orientation, I refer to the collective attitudes and reliance on technology within a society. Today, societies quickly and willingly adopt new technologies. One of the reasons can be that the latest tech trends are primarily global. Once a new gear is proven to work for one country, the others try to get it, too. They have already penetrated almost all spheres of life: work, personal, communication with others, both friends and relatives and strangers from the support service or local council, etc. Technologies give us freedom of movement: instead of standing in a queue to make an appointment with the doctor, we can either wait in line on a phone or book it online. We can watch the news from another side of the planet in online broadcasts and act according to them. When Russia started its brutal invasion of Ukraine on February 24th 2022, people all around the world went to the streets to protest against this unjust war, show their solidarity with Ukraine, and demand their governments to act.

Mutual economic orientation can manifest in various ways, and it often involves cooperation, trade, investment, or joint efforts to achieve common economic objectives. For instance, it plays a significant role in trade agreements and partnerships between countries or businesses since both parties engaged in exchanging goods and services strive for economic gain. Many contemporary economic alliances, such as the EU, USMCA, and GCC, promote deep economic integration and cooperation for mutual benefit and economic growth. Such unions typically involve a significant level of economic convergence and strive to create harmonized economic policies and a common market with the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor, opening more personal opportunities for each individual.

Moreover, thanks to the Internet, companies like Amazon, AliExpress, iHerbs, and so on could become powerful actors in the global economy, delivering their goods to almost any corner of the world. They play a significant role in shaping the economic orientation of the masses and influencing economic trends on a global scale. Activities, decisions, and practices of such global players have far-reaching impacts on individuals, communities, and even entire economies. On the bright side, they are providing jobs to millions of people worldwide and, as a rule, are at the forefront of technological advancements. On the other side,

they tend to monopolize the market, making it harder for the small providers to get into the game.

Let us finish this section with a group psychological orientation. By analogy to individual psychological orientation, it is an orientation towards other self/selves. As Stegmaier demonstrates, Others can become important footholds, creating both new orientation opportunities and problems.[15] Thus, this type of orientation plays a significant role in shaping human behavior and relationships. Empathy gives us the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, while the capacity for compassion involves a genuine concern for the well-being of Others. Parents are supposed to care for their children, doctors – for their patients, and businesses – for their clients. Both are essential for building positive relationships and maintaining Trust in the society. Trust often plays a crucial role in it, encouraging both sides to rely on each other and build solid and enduring relationships. Another aspect that the orientation toward others brings is the ability to take a different perspective, meaning the faculty to see situations from another person's point of view to understand their motives. It is fundamental for healthy social interactions since it helps debunk cognitive biases and prejudices.

Mutual orientation toward the future is also a type of group psychological orientation. It refers to a shared focus and vision for a common future. For example, a couple who decides to get married should first check if their image of the perfect future matches. A common understanding of what the desired future looks like and how each one can contribute to its realization are essential components of its success. Moreover, mutual orientation toward the future always involves aligning goals, aspirations, and strategies with the aim of achieving common objectives. If the couple's dream is to have kids and settle down, both partners will do their best to get a stable job in one city and find a nice neighborhood with good schools and a park. The same works for bigger groups. Companies that share the same values and purpose can build flourishing business partnerships to develop new products, expand into new markets, or pursue innovation for their mutual benefit. In the same manner, scientists from different institutions collaborate on projects to advance scientific discoveries and address complex challenges. Thus, mutual orientation toward the future fosters both local and global collaboration.

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15 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 112.

For the demonstrative purpose, all of the types are united in the *Figure* below:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">ORIENTATION</td></tr>
<tr><td>NATURAL ORIENTATION</td><td colspan="4">TAUGHT ORIENTATION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">INDIVIDUAL OR PERSONAL ORIENTATION</td><td colspan="3">MUTUAL OR GROUP ORIENTATION</td></tr>
<tr><td>NATURAL ORIENTATION</td><td>INDIVIDUAL TAUGHT ORIENTATION</td><td>INTERINDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL ORIENTATION</td><td>SOCIETAL ORIENTATION</td><td>GLOBAL OR WORLD ORIENTATION</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inner Time
Space
Biological pre-conditions</td><td>(Calendar, Clock) Time
Geographical
Moral / Ethical / Cultural / Juridical
Political / Ideological / Religious
Critical (Scientific, Economical, Linguistic, Technological)
Psychological
Orientation toward the future</td><td colspan="3">Ethical / Cultural / Juridical
Political / Ideological / Religious
Communicative
Technological
Economical
Psychological
Orientation toward the future</td></tr>
</table>

2. Taking the Concept of Crisis out of the Box

When talking about the concept of crisis, we can either refer to it in its narrow sense as a specific and acute situation that poses a serious threat, such as a pandemic, world financial or environmental crisis, or in a broad way as a crucial turning point, a situation of intense difficulty, danger, or uncertainty. The narrow meaning comes to mind first because of its massive impact, while the "little crises" of personal matters people tend to name by other names, like difficulties, troubles, and challenges, which seem to diminish their importance. The truth is that in both senses, a crisis implies a sense of urgency, instability, and the need for re-orientation and prompt and effective actions to address the encountered issue, and neglecting people's personal crises can have serious consequences.

In the same way, as the concept of orientation has been long enough ignored by philosophy, the concept of crisis has never occupied a central role in philosophical inquiries. For example, existentialism has already dealt with the fundamental questions and challenges of human existence that are closely related to the idea of crisis but did not extensively use the term itself. Albert Camus's works *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* are the brightest examples of men in existential crisis. Both main characters – Meursault and Sisyphus – bear the burden of the absurdity of life; the first one being unable and indifferent to conform to societal norms, the second – blindly following the ludicrous task gods assigned to him. Both heroes suffered from the incapability to orient themselves since the world seemed meaningless to them.

Contemporary ethics has started to pay more attention to the concept of crisis, which I genuinely believe to be a positive outcome of globalization. Such issues as climate change, global pandemics (and health, including mental, in general), famine, abuse of women's rights, wars, and other pressing concerns have become urgent matters of interest in academia. This recent research perspective has boosted the development of new fields and theories that address these challenges (environmental ethics, feminist ethics, just war theory, human rights, etc.). However, these areas are typically divided by specific crisis causes, taking into account only the narrow sense of the concept.

I insist that both meanings are significant for the philosophy orientation and necessary to build a holistic approach. Since inner crises, in a broad sense, can have an impact on natural orientation, which, in its turn, can influence all other types, preventing to reasonably deal with some big crises, in the narrow sense. Namely, congenital orientation bothered by inner crisis can negatively affect acquired orientations when they need to deal with external ones. Therefore, I will pay attention to both of them in the following two sections of the paper. First, we will talk of the crisis in its broad sense and see what types of multiple difficulties can affect natural and taught orientation, and how crises of one type of orientation impact the other types. Then, we will take an example of one recent crisis – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and see its example of how various types of orientations and their crises are interrelated with each other in the face of one big real-life threat.

2.1. Crises Related to the Different Types of Orientation

As before, we will start with the *natural orientation*, which includes *space, time* and *biological preconditions*. Normally, if your biological state is fine, you should not have any problems with any of these types of orientations. However, there are some health conditions that can negatively affect them. One such condition is the Alzheimer's disease. It slowly destroys the brain tissue, causing the loss of connections between neurons, which leads to a reduction in cognitive functioning. As Alzheimer's progresses, it causes severe perturbances in temporal and spatial orientation, provoking an individual's inability to understand and navigate the surroundings. Since it creates serious obstacles for our orientation, in my opinion, it deserves to be seen as a crisis in a broad sense. One of the treatments at the early stage of the disease (to slow its development) is giving time- or space-related tasks.[16]

Since space and time orientation are strictly embodied, they can also be modified by a direct external influence on one's body. Various medications and drugs can have different side effects: they can either slow down a person's perception of time (antidepressants and sedatives) or speed it up (stimulant drugs, like amphetamines and cocaine), impair motor coordination, making it challenging to navigate through physical space (benzodiazepines, like Valium and Xanax, and narcotic pain medications, like opioids), induce profound spatial distortions, including hallucinations and the perception of space as fluid or ever-changing (psychedelic drugs, like LSD and psilocybin mushrooms), and provoke a dissociative state, causing individuals to feel detached from their bodies and surroundings (ketamine). Alcohol can have adverse effects as well, impairing coordination and balance and slowing down a person's perception of time. It should be noted that all of the factors mentioned above affect both natural and taught time orientation, distorting one's temporal-related biorhythms and clock-/calendar orientation.

Since *taught orientation* has more variety, I will not present each type of orientation separately for each category but unite those that are the same for both, showing the differences that it may have, if they have. In the previous section, it was demonstrated that today's geographical orientation is closely

16 Camargo, Carlos Henrique Ferreira / Justus, Filipe Fernandes / Retzlaff, Giuliano, "The Effectiveness of Reality Orientation in the Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease," in: *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementia*, Vol. 30(5), (2015), pp. 527-532, doi:10.1177/1533317514568004.

bonded to the use of new technologies. Therefore, to successfully navigate in an unfamiliar environment, one should know how to use the navigation apps and the gear they are installed on. Of course, some people with strong spatial reasoning can do without them, but most of us rely heavily on the work of GPS and a good 4G connection. Such overreliance on technology can lead to a reduced ability to guide ourselves independently – we do not memorize the routes, remember the names of the streets, or recognize the buildings we are passing. Thus, if something happens to the device, we may feel completely lost. Nevertheless, even when everything is working fine, one can still have issues with technological orientation. Several factors, like age, low digital skills, and individual disabilities, may influence (but not necessarily do) a person's technological orientation.

Speaking of technological orientation in general, one should not only think of how they make our lives easier but also what impact they have on us. Obviously, the impact of a laptop is much greater than a fridge's, but even the latter has one if we think of it. A refrigerator helps us keep our food products fresh longer. Before its invention, people needed to go to the local farmer's market (geographic orientation) more often, communicate with the vendors (communicative orientation), choose the best goods at the offered price, and sometimes even bargain (economic orientation). Now, each of us has a supermarket nearby or can use Amazon Fresh or other providers to buy food for a week ahead without personally contacting anyone or arguing about the fairness of the price. The need for communication and economic orientations disappeared in these cases, making our lives both easier and less engaging (in the sense of real-life involvement).

Mostly, our communication nowadays is highly digitalized – we voicemail our friends, zoom with co-workers, chat with the services, and even have online appointments with our GPs. Digitalization removes lots of barriers: (1) *spatial*, allowing people from different corners of the world to stay in touch; (2) *linguistic*, helping people to understand each other with the help of Google Translator or other apps; (3) *psychological*, becoming a sanctuary where people, who are naturally shy and have difficulties in direct contact, present themselves without fear. But are they really safe? Unfortunately, it is not always so. The digital realm provides a platform for cyberbullying. Hiding behind the mask of a created avatar, some people get pleasure in offending others and provoking conflicts. The second issue is the data privacy and online security. Skilled hackers

can abuse them, by gaining access to people's bank accounts or private social media. Even if we don't take such extreme cases, people who spend too much time online can become digitally addicted, which can result in disconnection from reality and neglect of real-world relationships. Moreover, overreliance on digital communication can erode social skills and the ability to engage in face-to-face interactions, making it difficult to connect with others without digital intermediaries. Thus, although it brings many benefits, digitalization also has detrimental effects.

Moving on to the economic orientation, it can harm ethical or juridical ones. If one puts personal enrichment above everything else, they may not hesitate to use others or even break the law. A strong economic orientation can lead businesses to engage in unethical practices, such as cutting corners on product quality, exploiting employees, or engaging in deceptive marketing tactics to maximize profits. One of the most scandalous examples of our time is the Amazon policy. This American company has been constantly criticized for its grueling working conditions,[17] disregard of the safety regulators,[18] and illegal monopoly,[19] which led to a lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission against Amazon. At the same time, a lack of ethical leadership in the company can lead to unethical behavior among the employees and violations of regulations.

Sometimes, in the pursuit of economic gains, some individuals and businesses may push the boundaries of the law and operate in so-called legal gray zones. On the one hand, they do not directly violate the law but interpret it in such a way that it becomes beneficial to them. On the other, they are balancing on the edge since legal interpretation and the outcomes may vary depending on jurisdiction and context. For example, the regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies still evolves and varies from country to country. Since the legal status and taxation of cryptocurrencies and related activities are still unclear, people may not bother with these questions.

However, in some cases, individuals and organizations can deliberately break the law. One can rob the bank, steal a purse or a car, kidnap a child, embezzle a company's finances, blackmail someone, and so on. Of course, greed for easy money may not be the only motive for such an act. A person may suffer from mental or physical conditions, such as drug addiction, that can affect their

17 Sainato, 'They're more concerned about profit.'
18 Thorbecke, US Labor Department accuses Amazon of failing to keep warehouse workers safe.
19 Clayton, Espiner, Amazon: US accuses online giant of illegal monopoly.

critical and ethical orientation. The need for a new dose becomes the first and only value and priority. In addition, an individual moral compass can also break down due to a lack of proper education, psychological pressure (trying to fit in or gain social acceptance) or distress, lack of empathy (natural or gained), ideological beliefs, etc. The big companies, especially those who have a monopoly, from their part, can neglect the law by lobbying the legislation and regulations in their favor, ignoring sustainability practices that can potentially harm the environment, employees, and communities, aggressively suppressing their potential competitors, engaging in accounting frauds or corruption schemes, hiding debts, or not paying taxes.

Forming a closed group of like-minded individuals on any basis – cultural, political, ideological, religious, or cultural – can more easily develop prejudices. For instance, the following biases can thrive in such favorable conditions: (1) *in-group favoritism* – creating negative perceptions of out-group members, their values, ideas, and views; (2) *stereotyping* and *stigmatization* – making fuzzy (mostly negative) generalizations about others; judging another group based on the taught prejudices of your own one; (3) *Dunning-Kruger effect* – overestimating your own (your group's) competence or knowledge, believing in its inviolability and truthfulness; (4) *bandwagon effect* – limiting individual self-reflection by adopting dominant behaviors and beliefs of the group and following the crowd's decisions and choices; fostering social conformity within groups or communities; (5) *authority bias* – giving excessive credibility to those in positions of authority, often without questioning or critically evaluating their actions, decisions, or beliefs that may result in a reduction of independent thinking; (6) *status quo bias* – hindering individual/group orientation towards adaptation and progress.

Cognitive biases can have a damaging effect on people's critical orientation. David Kahneman showed that cognitive biases work in the fast, instinctive and emotional system of human thinking, unconsciously pushing us to hasty judge, decide or act. In some cases, such a rapid reaction can literally save one's life, but mainly, in a standard, unendangered daily routine, it results in a non-rational way of thinking.[20] People who often rely on this intuitive thinking can become victims of flawed judgments and systematic errors. Critical orientation, based on any knowledge that one has – scientific, linguistic, economic, etc. – aims

20 Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

to make our thinking more rational and our judgments and decisions more reasonable. Thus, it asks for more concentration and mental effort. Suppose political, ideological, or religious orientation strengthens cognitive biases and prompts people to react quickly and unconditionally to accept everything given. In that case, they damage human cognitive orientation that works in a slow mode.

Another example: a strong alignment with a particular political or religious ideology can contribute to political or religious polarization, where the group itself becomes less open to compromise and less willing to engage with individuals holding alternative views. This tendency may result in members primarily engaging with like-minded individuals or consuming media that only reinforces their existing beliefs. Scientists, even if they are not politically, ideologically or religiously engaged, can also suffer from the attachment to their theories, ignoring materials that criticize and potentially prove them wrong. In psychology, this attitude is called a confirmation or my-side bias.

Social networks make this picture even worse, surrounding people with information they are likely to like. The fans of conspiracy theories can happily dive into the world of millions of fake news, rumors, and conspiracies. Using AI algorithmic editing, social media create so-called filter bubbles, excluding opposing views and news that may displease the users. Thus, you receive exactly those advertisements that can make you personally want to spend money (manipulate your economic orientation) and videos that will capture your attention to make you spend more time online. Such actions can have even more serious consequences: on a political level, depriving voters of complete information about the political campaigns of all candidates or shutting down the news with sensitive content. Yet, turning a blind eye to the genocide of the whole nation by a crazy dictator won't prevent the problem from existing. On the contrary, it will only aggravate it because the unshakable faith in his own strength will push this despot to commit more horrendous crimes.

Let us say two more words about ideologies. Their main task is to create a framework for understanding the world and interpreting events and consequently influencing behavior and decisions. For example, animal rights ideologists may choose to become vegetarian because of their beliefs. However, ideologies mostly have a negative impact, leading to rigid and dogmatic thinking and resulting in closed-mindedness of the group that is easy to manipulate. Though ideological education leaders can propagate violence and extremism, fostering

an "us vs. them" mentality. History knows a lot of horrifying examples: Nazi ideology based on a belief in Aryan racial superiority and anti-Semitism, Spanish Inquisition driven by the ideology of the Catholic Church, Holodomor and Stalin's repressions induced by communist ideology.

A closer look at the example of the ideology of the Soviet Union shows that it was an open-sky prison where people's freedom of thinking, speech, and choice was oppressed and restricted. Communist government abused censorship and propaganda to control the flow of information. Anyone who tried to protest or oppose the tyranny was either killed or sent to Labor Camps, Gulags, which were actually a delayed death sentences because almost no one could survive there due to harsh living conditions, inadequate food, and physical abuse. Millions of Ukrainians were starved to death by Stalin's order in the early 1930s when they tried to revolt and leave the Soviet Union. Ten years later, thousands of Crimean Tatars were deported from their homeland to remote regions in Russia or labor camps for the same reason. This is what ideology can do in the hands of a powerful and merciless leaders.

Speaking of crises related to individual-psychological orientation, I primarily refer to the mental prerequisites that can affect orientation. It could be a childhood trauma from bullying at school or being raised without a parent, PTSD as a result of a severely traumatic event in the past, a state of grief, a sexual trauma caused by sexual assault, rape, or constant harassment. This list can be extended further, but we will stop here. The main point is that any traumatic experience can significantly affect an individual's sense of orientation in various ways: (1) disrupt an individual's cognitive, emotional, and psychological functioning, leading to changes in their perception of self, the world, and others; (2) cause time distortion, challenging to maintain a clear understanding of the past, present, and future by making people feel that time has slowed down or sped up; (3) provoke the loss of trust that prevents the feeling of safety in various situations; (4) lead to heightened arousal (hyperarousal - constant vigilance and anxiety) or decreased arousal (hypoarousal - dissociation or emotional numbness) responses; (5) cause the breakdown of healthy coping mechanisms, causing individuals to turn to maladaptive strategies like substance abuse or self-harm; (6) worsen the interpersonal relations; (7) negatively impact one's future orientation.

Thus, mental traumas can seriously hurt our perception of both presence and future. For example, a person in grief can become withdrawn and

unsociable during the period of grief, lack the motivation to continue working or even living, forbid themselves to be happy, have a good time and move on. Fortunately, not everyone exposed to a traumatic experience develops long-lasting psychological symptoms, yet some people do. Therefore, it is vital that these states are adequately treated by society, and people who suffer from any psychological distress get all the needed support and assistance to be able to return to a normal life as soon as possible.

Apart from that, self-orientation, which we have already discussed, is influenced by an individual's self-concept, including self-image, self-esteem, and self-worth. An unhealthy self-concept can lead to various challenges (inner crises) in personal orientation: (1) *low confidence* (self-esteem) may force people to doubt their abilities, feel inadequate, and have a negative view of themselves, which can hinder them from pursuing their goals and aspirations; (2) *problems with self-acceptance* (self-identity) may cause the feeling of discomfort in your own skin and provoke internal negative self-talk (one may constantly criticize him/herself and his/her actions) and even self-sabotaging behaviors (unconscious disruption of one's own success and well-being); (3) *fear of rejection and failure* may lead to a constant avoidance of taking risks or trying new things (because of a lack of self-belief in being capable of success); (4) *social withdrawal and self-isolation* may happen because of the fear of judgment or rejection by others; (5) *persistent negative self-perceptions* can contribute to emotional distress and cause mental health issues like depression and anxiety; (6) *lack of personal direction and motivation* involves a struggle to define your life goals and purpose.

Such crises can be temporal and have a natural origin, like growing up or ageing. However, the impact of one's environment should not be underestimated. Bad relationships with the people who surrender you daily can aggravate your self-concept, worsen mutual psychological orientation, and result in other types of crises, like maladaptive coping, recovery difficulties, interpersonal problems, crises of autonomy and self-reliance, attachment crises that affect one's ability to form healthy bonds, and in the worst-case scenario, even suicidal and self-harm inclinations. For example, children who have lasting miscommunication and strained relationships with their parents or guardians may underperform academically, be aggressive and unsociable, and easily pick up bad habits because the detrimental atmosphere at home harms their psychological well-being and causes ongoing distress.

Trust issues are especially menacing for psychological orientation. Various sources and circumstances can significantly undermine an individual's or a group's feeling of trust, and once it has been damaged, it is complicated to restore. Once a person faces a betrayal such as infidelity, broken promises, or deception, it can erode trust. This unpleasant experience can even remain in the form of psychological trauma in the person's subconscious, which can further shape their behavior and attitude towards others in such a way as to protect themselves from potential harm. Lack of transparency and openness in relationships, whether in personal or professional contexts, can also create distrust. People may feel uneasy when they perceive that information is being withheld or that their partners are intentionally hiding something from them, and even when the others are completely honest and sincere with them, they may continue to wait for the pitfalls. If the worst comes to worst, trust issues can result in paranoia and hypervigilance – the heightened states of alertness that can lead to emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion.

Mutual psychological orientation can be further aggravated by regular inadequate or ineffective communication (communicative orientation problems) that leaves space for interpersonal misunderstandings and misinterpretations, ongoing conflicts and unresolved issues, the presence of hostility towards others, including strangers or foreigners (problems with psychological orientation towards Others), lingering negative past experiences, rejection of any differences (cultural and ethical orientation problems) and resistance to new perspectives (can be political, ideological, religious, cultural, ethical and psychological orientation problems), and so on. It is crucial to understand that all orientations are interrelated. Thus, no matter which type was the first to trigger the critical situation, playing the role of the first fallen domino, it may drag all the others with it.

For example, personal or mutual orientation towards the future can be equally troubled by all the psychological conditions mentioned above, economic factors, like financial insecurity, including unemployment and debt; environmental and societal issues, such as environmental challenges, social unrest, or political instability, excessive use of technologies and information overloads, and so on. Regardless of which factor was decisive in causing the disorientation in the vision of the future, a person would feel the consequences. One may struggle with decision-making and long-term planning, fail to think creatively outside the box, lose opportunities because of their indecisiveness

or lack of initiative, and avoid tasks requiring responsibility. In general, all of that can lead to personal and professional stagnation, causing the feeling of frustration, unfulfillment and deep dissatisfaction.

2.2. Holistic Approach: the Interconnection of Orientations Regarding the Example of a World Crisis

Before we continue with the overview of a current world crisis, I'd like to highlight a couple of crucial points on what I call *a holistic approach* to the orientation: (1) *natural* and *taught orientations* should not be seen as living separately one from another or used one at a time. They are all interconnected and interchangeable. In the previous section, we have seen that some types of orientations can harm other types. For example, the cognitive biases strengthened by political, ideological, or religious orientation can unfavorably affect people's critical orientation. But they can also help one another if needed. For instance, when you have troubles orienting yourself in a foreign country – Google Maps is not working for some reason – your communicative and linguistic abilities may still help you instead. (2) Together, *natural* and *taught orientations* organize an *overall orientation system* — a complex of different types of orientation, which I have presented above in the first section, that are involved in the orientation process. In other words, the *overall orientation system* includes both *natural* and *taught orientations*. The issues in one of the categories, with one of their types, can impact the work of the whole system. For instance, having prejudices against some ethnic or religious group can prevent you to invest money in a company or start-up they are leading, and, as a consequence, you can lose profit. (3) Thus, to understand and, more importantly, deal with a crisis (in a narrow sense), an individual's *overall orientation* should be stable and transparent, meaning that one should be certain that it is not negatively impacted by inner orientation crises (in a broad sense) that can inflict his thinking.

Saying that let us move forward to observe the interconnection of orientations on the example of the most recent global crisis[21] – the new outbreak in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this section, we will study how the two opposite groups – pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian – operate the information, according to their pre-fixed orientations and how people who are not personally

21 The paper was written in October 2023.

engaged in a conflict should (at least try to) critically and rationally orient in it. I do not intend to explain the roots of the conflict or make any judgments concerning who is right and who is wrong, but to analyze the difference of orientations by focusing your attention on one single event that took place on October 23rd, 2023 – the release of two hostages, Yocheved Lifshitz and Nurit Yitzhak, by Hamas.

On October 24th, 2023, Yocheved Lifshitz gave a press conference describing her experience in captivity. We will first take a look at what was said by the elder woman and analyze how it can be critically seen by the outsiders uninvolved in the conflict. Then, we will compare how both sides of the conflict presented the information in their media and news. I am adding the transcripts below. It comprises the English translations of the direct speech (TDS) in Hebrew by Mrs. Lifshitz during the press conference and the English live translation (LT) of the speech made by her daughter during the press conference[22].

TDS: *I thank you for coming to hear about the tragedy of myself and my friends, we hope to pass through this period <…>*[23] *I've been through hell. We never thought we'll reach such a state. They went berserk in our kibbutz,*[24] *put me on the motorcycle on the side and drove through the fields. The blew up the electronic fence that was built for 2,5 billion dollars. Masses stormed our homes, hit people. They did not care about kidnapping elderly and children. It was extremely painful. I was laying on the motorcycle and on the way the beat me. They didn't break my ribs, but it was extremely painful for me <…> When we got there, they told us that they believe in the Quran and they will do us no harm and give us the same conditions as they have. We started walking through the tunnels with wet ground and extreme humidity, we reached a big hall, where 25 kidnapped were concentrated. After two or three hours they separated five people from my kibbutz and put in the separate room. The guards were next to us with a paramedic and a doctor. We laid there on mattresses. They took care of the sanitary situation. A doctor came every two or three days to check on us. The paramedic provided some medicine. The guy that was carried by the motorbike was wounded very badly on his hands and his legs. It was very difficult to see him. He is in a better condition now. The doctor prescribed some*

22 The full version of the press conference can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mX6TE1Inx3E.
23 <…> - this sign represents the pause she took during the broadcasting to regain her breath of listen to the asked question
24 *Kibbutz* – type of settlement unique to Israel; also use as a synonym for a "community" or "group."

antibiotics, and his condition started improving <...> There were five [people] in each room and a guard, who was in charge of us. There were a lot of women there. They took care of keeping women hiding. They cleaned us up for the disease, they feared that they themselves will be contaminated by infections. <...> They did not wish to speak about politics. They spoke about different things. They were friendly in their way <...> They made sure that we eat the same food that they eat, white cheese and cucumbers, that was a meal for the whole day <...> Last message – we were very hurt by the fact that IDF[25] *did not know [about the planned attack]. We were the scapegoats. They [Hamas] warned us three weeks' prior with the people who came to the fence and sent incendiary balloons to burn our fields. The IDF did not address this seriously. Suddenly on Saturday morning [Shabbat] when everything was quiet, there was a heavy bombardment of the communities and with that the masses infiltrated blew up the expensive fence, opened the gates of the kibbutz, and entered. It was extremely difficult. I keep having those images in my mind <...> They were prepared for this for a long time, including the needs for the women.*
LT: *My mom is telling the horrific stories. She's saying that many-many people, a swarm of people, came through the fence – the fence cost 2,5 billion shekels and it didn't help even a little bit. My mom is saying that she was taken on the back of the motorbike with her legs on one side and a head on another side, that she was taken through the ploughed fields with a man in front on one side and a man behind her. While she was being taken, she was hit with sticks by shabaab*[26] *people until they reached the tunnels. There they walked for a few kilometers on the wet ground. There is a huge network of tunnels underneath, it looks like a spider web. When they arrived in a large hall, in which about 25 hostages were gathered, and after two or three hours 5 hostages, she among them, were taken into a separate room. My mom is saying that they were very friendly towards them and that they took care of them. They were given the medicine and treated. One of the men with them had been badly injured from a motorbike accident on the way, and the paramedic was looking after his wounds. He was given medicine and antibiotics. The people were friendly and kept the place very clean. They were very concerned about them. My mom is speaking about the time there. She's telling us about sharing food with the people. When she first arrived, they [the captor] told them [the hostages] that they are Muslims and they're not going to hurt them. They ate the same food that*

25 Israel Defence Forces.
26 *Al-Shabaab* – a Sunni Islamist militant group.

the Hamas was eating. My mom feels that was quite enough at the moment. My mom is very much hoping that all the people that were with her will come back. And the story is not over until everybody has come back, and we can start building again something.

So, what are the essential points that an average person with no direct involvement in the conflict can critically extract from the speech?

– *Psychological orientation*: The speech conveys a deep sense of human suffering and emotional distress. It describes a harrowing experience involving a forced journey through dangerous areas, physical violence, and captivity. People with a normal or elevated level of empathy may feel a profound compassion for the misfortune this elderly woman went through. And since she shows tremendous compassion towards the other hostages, talking not only about herself but also about the other people in captivity (the wounded man and the women), this shared empathy may also encourage one to believe in the truthfulness of the heard story. Thus, human orientation towards the other – in this case towards Yocheved Lifshitz – takes a dominant position, helping to see her perspective of the events, feel her pain and fear, and understand her emotions. Moreover, her expression of hope that all held people will return safely at the end of the speech shows that she shares this mutual orientation towards the others, knowing the emotional turmoil and uncertainty that the families and friends of hostages (and the hostages themselves) experience, and, despite all, has an orientation toward the future that corresponds to the mutual desire.

– *Ethical and critical orientation*: Despite the initial violence that caused a significant amount of physical pain and mental distress to the old lady, the captors (who guarded her) are portrayed as treating the hostages kindly, providing medical care and sharing food, which are the vivid manifestations of an ethical attitude towards others. This point contradicts the standard perceptions of captors, who are generally presented in news, movies, and literature as cruel and inhuman, and may stimulate a person to check the validity of his/her views and their appropriateness to the current situation (namely, reorient within the current situation). However, one should not forget that Yocheved Lifshitz was one among the five hostages who were placed separately in a special room, so we cannot be sure that the other 20 people experienced the same care and attitude during this time. Since to this time, there is no evidence of the state of the other hostages, one should not jump to any conclusions based on the *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, like in a logical fallacy, "all swans are white."

– *Religious and critical orientation*: The captors themselves claimed to be Muslims. Lifshitz' daughter uses the terms "shabaab people" and "Hamas" talking about them, which can be either completely incomprehensible for someone raised within Western culture or have a negative connotation because of the radicalism of Islamic terrorism shown in the news. When people are scared (which is an absolutely normal psychological reaction to violence) and do not understand the mentality of other cultures or religions, they become victims of stereotyped thinking. Thus, they may judge all Muslims by the picture of the one terrorist. Such a generalization leads to the demonization of a vast religious group that is actually (multi-)diverse – Sunni Muslims are different from Shiites and Sufis, Malaysian Muslims are different from Arab Muslims, and even within the same community, people can still be different. The descriptions given in Lifshitz's speech make one rethink the picture that he/she has and perceive the current radicalism of this one act – taking hostages of the Israelis – as a prepared appeal for attention (although extreme and aggressive) more than a direct attack to kill since after the hostages were safely hidden in the tunnels, they were kindly treated, which may indicate to the fact that the captors honestly mean no harm as they have said. However, it is still too early to make such a conclusion since most of the people, including small kids, women, young people, and Yocheved Lifshitz's husband, are still in captivity!

– *Economic and political orientation*: Yocheved Lifshitz expresses disappointment that the Israel Defense Forces were not taking seriously the potential threat despite prior warning signs and showed themselves unprepared for the attack. Moreover, she is displeased with the fact that a large sum of money was spent on defense measures that proved to be so ineffective – the attackers could easily infiltrate and breach the security fence, which can be seen as a significant security failure. This kind of criticism can make outsiders doubt the effectiveness, security measures, and the ability of the Israel Defense Forces to protect the area. To the outsiders, the second text can also evoke the feeling of the lack

The Jerusalem Post[27]	**Al-Jazeera**[28]
An elderly Israeli hostage released by Hamas on Monday night said terrorists beat her as she was taken into Gaza on October 7 but was then well-treated during her two-week captivity in the Palestinian enclave. *Yocheved Lifshitz, 85, was one of two women freed late Monday, leaving around 220 hostages still in the hands of Hamas.* *Seated in a wheelchair, a frail-looking Lifshitz told reporters at Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center that „I have been through hell" but that a doctor had visited her while she was held in a network of tunnels within Gaza and that all her needs had been taken care of.*	*An 85-year-old Israeli woman who was taken captive by Hamas for two weeks said she was beaten while being abducted, but treated "well" while in the Gaza Strip.* *Yocheved Lifshitz was freed on Monday night along with another elderly woman, 79-year-old Nurit Cooper. Hamas released them on "humanitarian" grounds in a deal brokered by Qatar and Egypt.* *The women are the third and fourth captives released by Hamas since its October 7 onslaught on Israel; some 218 people, including foreigners and dual nationals, are still in captivity in the besieged Palestinian enclave.*

27 Jaffe-Hoffman, M. (24 Oct. 2023) Freed Israeli hostage Yocheved Lifshitz: Hamas beat me with a wooden pole. The Jerusalem Post. Online access: https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-769904

28 AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES (24 Oct 2023) Israeli captive endured 'hell' in attack, but treated 'well' in Gaza. Online access: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/israeli-captive-endured-hell-in-attack-but-treated-well-in-gaza

Analysis: From the beginning, the used language is already political. From the transcripts above, one can see that Yocheved Lifshitz did not use the word *terrorist* in her speech. Thus, one can suppose that the journalist intentionally mentions this term to pass forward the political orientation. Pay attention to the accents put in this small fragment – talking about the fact that Lifshitz was liberated; the Jerusalem Post journalist reminds us of a huge number of people who are still kept hostage, which reduces the meaning of a Hamas gesture. Moreover, describing the poor state of the elderly woman, he then chooses the words "I have been through hell" from her speech that are overly emotional and more likely to reach the deep psychological level of the readers and orient them more sympathetically towards the older women and the story given by the journal.	**Analysis:** In this extract, the news is less politically framed; however, since Al-Jazeera is a Qatari state-owned media network, the journalist finds it important to mention Qatar's involvement in the return of Yocheved Lifshitz from the beginning, which can also be seen as a political move. The language is more neutral. However, using "for the words well and humanitarian " can leave some place for ambiguity since it can be seen as an additional accent, quotation, or sarcasm. Al-Jazeera also highlights that Lifshitz is not the first to be released by Hamas – emphasising the success of negotiations – and gives a different, smaller number than Jerusalem Post, which should motivate anyone to fact-check the information in the other sources.

"They went wild in our kibbutz," the former captive told reporters. "They blew up the fence we built for two and a half billion dollars. They attacked our houses. They killed and kidnapped both old and young with no distinction."

Lifshitz described the situation as a "nightmare we couldn't have imagined" and one that she keeps "repeating in my mind."

When they captured her, she said, they put her on a motorcycle with her legs tied on one side and her head on the other and then raced her through the fields. There were motorcycles on either side and also one behind.

<...>

"A person with us had been severely wounded on his hands and legs by a motorbike crash on the way. It was heartbreaking to see that," Lifshitz recalled. But she said they gave him antibiotics, and that he was doing better when she was released.

"They were very concerned with hygiene and were worried about an outbreak of something. We had toilets which they cleaned every day," she continued.

'They seemed ready for this' Lifshitz, sitting in a wheelchair outside a Tel Aviv hospital on Tuesday, recounted being assaulted by her captors as they sped her into Gaza on the back of a motorbike on October 7.

"When I was on the bike, my head was on one side and the rest of my body on the other side," she said. "The young men hit me on the way. They didn't break my ribs but it was painful and I had difficulty breathing. I've been through hell … we didn't think or know we would get to this situation."

Once in Gaza, however, she said her captors "treated her well", giving her and other captives "the same food they ate" and bringing in a doctor to provide medicine.

"They treated us gently, and provided all our needs," she said, when questioned about her reason for shaking the hand of one of her captors at the moment of her release.

"They seemed ready for this, they prepared for a long time, they had everything that men and women needed, including shampoo," she added.

Analysis: The Jerusalem Post journalist continues with the long emotive retelling of the parts of Lifshitz's story, where she describes the moment of abduction, the way through the network of tunnels, and the experience in captivity underground, quoting once again the most emotional bits that should elicit empathy towards the elderly lady among the readers. Even though the journalist includes the description of the received treatment, it was given in a more "rigid" way that may evoke indignation against the attackers. However, it should be noticed that since the journalist is not the outsider in this conflict and deeply cares about everything that happens in her country, such manipulation of the emotions of the readers can be the unintentional product of the state of mutual psychological orientation the journalist reconnects with while listening to Lifshitz's story.	**Analysis:** Al-Jazeera mostly skips the part on abduction, mentioning only the beating on the way, and makes the main accent on the good treatment of the elderly woman during her captivity in Gaza. Such preference for chosen information can be explained by mutual political or religious orientation with the Palestinian community, which creates a special psychological attachment that is not yet visible in group favouritism but can be its "dawn". The pieces of information were selected precisely to create a good ambience, so even the sentence they seemed ready for this gets more neutral, if not positive, connotation and downplays the fact that this preparation included the planned attack on civilians, which can be seen as a method to manipulate the readers via their ethical and psychological orientations.

Former captive: IDF was not prepared for October 7 massacre

Lifshitz claimed the IDF was not prepared for the events of October 7.

"We were very hurt by the fact that the IDF did not know [this was going to happen]," she charged. "They warned us three weeks prior when masses arrived at the fence and sent incendiary balloons to burn our fields. The IDF did not address this seriously.

"Then, suddenly, on Saturday morning, when everything was quiet, there was a heavy bombardment," she continued. "We were left to fend for ourselves."

In contrast, she said Hamas seemed prepared for the massacre it carried out.

"They were prepared for this. They were prepared for a very long time," she said.

Hamas said on Sunday that it released Lifshitz and a second woman, Nurit Cooper, 79, on health grounds after taking them and more than 200 others hostage in the massacre that left more than 1,400 people dead.

Lifshitz, who lives in the Nir Oz kibbutz near the Gaza Strip, said Israel's military had underestimated the threat posed by Hamas, and that the costly security fence "didn't help at all".

Will hostages take priority?

On October 7, armed men from Hamas mowed down parts of the security fence separating Gaza from southern Israel, killing more than 1,400 people and seizing more than 220 captives.

Israel has responded with a relentless bombing campaign on Gaza, devastating much of the territory's infrastructure and killing more than 5,700 people, mostly civilians. According to the Palestinian health ministry, at least 704 people were killed by Israeli air strikes on the Strip in the past day alone. Israel has also cut off Gaza's fuel, electricity and water.

As Israel readies for a potentially bloody ground assault into the strip, it has ordered more than 1.1 million Palestinians to evacuate the northern part of the territory, warning they may be treated as "terror accomplices" if they do not do so.

Analysis: The language of this segment is even more disturbing, and the use of such strong words as massacre [that Lifshitz did not use herself] shows how emotionally involved the journalist is. Therefore, it is important to consider the presence of *potential biases,* like *in-group, attentional, naïve realism, stigmatisation*, and especially *omission bias* (which express the tendency to judge harmful actions as worse or less moral than equally harmful inactions). Here, one can see that while Lifshitz criticised IDF for their overconfidence that made this attack possible, the journalist tries to put the accents in such a way (e.g. emphasising the numbers) so that Hamas would be the only one to blame.	**Analysis:** Al-Jazeera continues by changing the topic from Lifshitz's story to Israel's response, showing that the amount of victims from the Palestinian side exceeds the death rate of the Israelis. This unexpected change of subject can be perceived either as an objective necessity to show the downside of the story (which is the brutality of Israel's reaction) or as an attempt to shift attention from the primary cause of the new outbreak of the conflict that was a planned and prepared-in-advance Hamas attack. In Informal logic, this type of manipulation corresponds to the suppressed correlative fallacy, also known as the fallacy of lost contrast, which in this case can be expressed as "Hamas is not that bad because Israel is worse".

Lifshitz was kidnapped with her 83-year-old husband, Oded, who is still in captivity. *Lifshitz is a peace activist who, together with her husband, helped sick Palestinians in Gaza get to hospital for years.* *"They are human rights activists, peace activists for all their life," grandson Daniel Lifshitz told Reuters in Tel Aviv shortly before his grandmother's release was confirmed. "For more than a decade, they took... sick Palestinians from the Gaza Strip – not from the West Bank, from the Gaza Strip – every week from the Erez border to the hospitals in Israel to get treatment for their disease, for cancer, for anything."*	*Israel has said its top goal in the war is to "obliterate Hamas", but world leaders and Israeli families have urged for the captives to take priority.* *French President Emmanuel Macron, who visited Israel on Tuesday, said securing the release of the captives which includes French nationals should be the "first objective".* *US President Joe Biden, who is eager to bring home 10 Americans thought to be held in the Gaza Strip, said on Monday he would be open to negotiations for a ceasefire only once all captives are released.* *Noam Alon, the boyfriend of a 27-year-old woman abducted by Hamas, is one of many Israelis hoping the Israeli government will focus on the captives' plight. Freeing them "should be the top priority, not to destroy Hamas, not to control Gaza and not anything else", he said.*
Analysis: The overall tone and framing of the text have a direct goal to influence the readers' emotional response. At the end of the article, the journalist highlights that Lifshitz and her husband, who are still in captivity, are peace activists who have been helping Palestinians all their lives, which makes it greatly unjust that exactly these people got abducted by Hamas.	**Analysis:** Al-Jazeera pursues inflaming the atmosphere, saying that Israel's main target is to "obliterate Hamas", but the presence of the hostages stops them from doing so. This kind of reasoning can be seen as an excuse for Hamas for not releasing the captives.

Overall conclusion: Through the article's text, one can see that the Jerusalem Post journalist is ideologically tightly connected with the orientation of the Israel state. She shares a mutual psychological orientation with the Israeli people, and her emotive text is directed towards this orientation since it is the most fruitful ground for communication. The use of specific language and word accents also helps the communicative orientation. However, outsiders may notice the one-sidedness of the written material and the (probably unconscious) intention of the author to show the world in black and white. Such a strict demarcation prevents the article from providing a well-rounded view of the situation.	**Overall conclusion:** Al-Jazeera's article tries to provide the full scope of information from both sides. However, their mutual orientation with the Palestinians (most likely based on mutual religious and cultural grounds) prevents them from doing it objectively. Starting with the short mention of the story of the abduction and release of Yocheved Lifshitz by Hamas, the article dives into accusations of Israel's brutal response. Thus, one can get the feeling that the news is given deliberately in such a way as to manipulate the critical orientation of the readers, making the image of Hamas captors seen as a lesser evil in the background of Israel's answer.

3. Conclusion

The relationship between orientation and crisis reveals a complex interplay that is vital for understanding how humans navigate both daily life and extraordinary challenges. Orientation, whether instinctual or cognitive, is not only a survival mechanism but a fundamental aspect of human existence that allows us to make sense of the world and act within it. Crises, in turn, test this ability by disrupting our usual patterns of orientation, forcing us to recalibrate and find new paths. The interconnectedness of different types of orientation means that instability in one area can either cascade, leading to broader disorientation, or uphold and stabilize (what is usually the case) the overall orientation system. Therefore, a comprehensive philosophy of orientation must account for both the natural and thought-based capacities we rely on, as well as the ways crises challenge and reshape these abilities.

Since we live in a world of multiple crises, it has become crucial to have a stable basis that can support the Overall Orientation system. Therefore, understanding that orientation is not just about physical navigation but also mental, emotional, and social plays a significant role. Strengthening your cognitive, emotional, and practical capacities to navigate through uncertainty will provide a more stable foundation for dealing with specific crises. Moreover, if a broad crisis may ask for a new strategic and long-term recalibration, a narrow one might demand quick and decisive action from a person. In essence, orienting oneself in times of multiple crises requires a holistic approach that acknowledges the complexity of human orientation, that is has two sides – congenital and acquired, and the challenges posed by crises, in both narrow and broad sense.

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II.

Orientation Needs in Crises – from a Psychological and Philosophical Perspective

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"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family
is unhappy in its own way."
Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 1877

Abstract: Life is a complex web of choices, both conscious and subconscious, that individuals perpetually navigate. Crises significantly complicate this orientation process, impacting individuals, organizations, nations, and society by dismantling familiar structures that typically provide security. The disappearance of these safety nets leaves individuals feeling disoriented and insecure about the future. This paper explores the orientation process – the act of seeking comfort and ease amidst challenging circumstances – during periods of overlapping and compounding crises. Understanding this instinctive process is crucial when familiar routines fail to deliver satisfactory outcomes. Drawing on Werner Stegmaier's philosophy of orientation and exploring the orientation process through the lens of Maslow's motivational theory, this analysis emphasizes the concept of re-orientation in times of crisis. In today's reality of simultaneous and intersecting crises, the capacity for rapid re-orientation – evaluating the impact of crises and charting a path forward – emerges as an essential skill. Orientation innovation, the ability to adapt and rethink one's approach, becomes a defining characteristic of effective crisis navigation.

1. Introduction

The abstraction provided by philosophy enables a higher order of observation, which is essential for comprehending the current paradigm shift. Furthermore, the descriptive nature of a philosophical discourse avoids the dogmatic and prescriptive tendencies often found outside its domain, offering a more nuanced and thoughtful perspective on the often-divisive views surrounding crises.

Crises present unique challenges that compel individuals and groups to reorient themselves. These periods of profound distress can overwhelm previously effective orientation mechanisms, necessitating the establishment of new footholds. While crises disrupt established routines and fixed beliefs, they simultaneously create opportunities for fresh beginnings, new orientations, and the development of entirely novel moral frameworks. This paper examines orientation processes in the context of multiple crises, focusing on individual orientations through the lens of personal context and with particular emphasis on individual needs, as outlined in Maslow's theory. I propose a synthesis of Maslow's theory of motivation[1] with Stegmaier's philosophy of orientation[2] to better understand the complex decision-making processes that emerge during crises. While Maslow's framework has faced criticism regarding its lack of empirical evidence, sequential nature of needs and its applicability in certain contexts[3], it nonetheless provides a unique perspective on orientation by shifting attention to the intrinsic psychological dimensions of human motivation.[4]

According to Maslow, human navigation is predominantly guided by prevailing needs, driving individuals to act in ways that either satisfy these needs or mitigate perceived threats to them.[5] When combined with Stegmaier's descriptive approach — which centers on understanding the orientation process

1 Abraham Harold Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1954); Abraham Harold Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand Company, 1968); Abraham Harold Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (Delhi, India: Pearson Education, 1987); Abraham Harold Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," in: *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943).

2 Werner Stegmaier, *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation*, transl. Reinhard G. Mueller (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

3 See Mahmoud A. Wahba / Lawrence G Bridwell, "Maslow reconsidered: A review of research on the need hierarchy theory," in: *Organizational behavior and human performance*, 15 (2) (1976), for the most common critique points.

4 Maslow, "A theory of human motivation", p. 3.

5 See *Motivation and Personality,* the posthumous publication of Maslow's work, for more details on addressing most critique points such as acknowledgement of overlapping simultaneous needs, peak experience and transcendence that go beyond self-actualization.

itself — this synthesis sheds light on the mechanisms of orientation during crises and offers additional support for those seeking direction.

Although Maslow and Stegmaier approach orientation from distinct perspectives, their complementary insights highlight the centrality of individual needs in shaping orientation mechanisms and the ability of individuals to chart their course through challenging situations. By integrating both perspectives, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate crises and adapt to shifting circumstances.

1.1. Orientation Principles: Foundations

Stegmaier's understanding of orientation underscores the temporary constraints and inherent uniqueness of each orientation situation, emphasizing that every instance is novel and necessitates a degree of effort from the individual. The process of individual orientation is often accompanied by feelings of unsettlement, particularly when one is confronted with unfamiliar circumstances. In such scenarios, factors such as time pressure, the influence of others, and moral dilemmas emerge as equally significant elements within the broader equation.[6]

Mastering the art of "finding one's way"[7] entails the manner in which an individual engages with each situation within an ever-changing context, drawing upon their continuously developing orientation skills. The outcomes of this process are contingent upon the individual's approach to their circumstances. Each challenge requires reorientation, and the individual's understanding of their situation determines their response. Over time, the accumulation of knowledge and experience contributes to the development of personal tools — impacting plausibilities and orientation routines — that serve as footholds, guiding mechanisms, and strategies for self-regulations.[8] Simultaneously, the external world provides a framework through which individuals navigate, at times adhering to established norms, while at other times deviating from them when they comprehend alternative possibilities.

This process persists throughout life, as the uniqueness of each context necessitates ongoing reassessment and reorientation, perpetuating this cycle until death, which serves as the natural end to all orientation.[9] Just as geographical

6 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 30.
7 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 25.
8 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* pp. 82-86.
9 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 275.

orientation in an unfamiliar territory differs from adapting to a new role at work or adjusting to parenthood, so too do the mechanisms of orientation vary across different contexts. For instance, the strategies employed to navigate an unknown landscape differ significantly from those required to adapt to a new role within a workplace, or to assume the responsibilities of partnership or parenthood. This interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic influences shapes individual orientation, often relying on familiar routines and personal interpretations of situations.

The novelty of a given situation and the availability of orientation markers significantly influence the degree of unsettlement experienced. Unique orientation challenges arise continuously throughout life, yielding both positive and negative encounters that enable individuals to refine specific tools for navigation. This includes the inherent capacity for orientation itself, which encompasses not only the ability to orient oneself but also the ability to orient others — an emerging and increasingly central aspect of successful navigation, particularly during periods of crisis.

In summary, Stegmaier examines orientation from multiple perspectives, positing that certain often-overlooked conditions — situativity, selectivity, and perspectivity — characterize the orientation process. The presence of reliable footholds and a clear understanding of available options guide individual orientation, with orientation mechanisms steadily evolving in meaning as no situation is ever repeated in precisely the same way. The orientation process unfolds simultaneously across individual, group, and global systems. Such coexistence can generate conflicts among competing orientations, requiring individuals to navigate these tensions through recourse to their personal knowledge, morals, interests, and values.

1.2. Maslow's Theory of Motivation: Foundations

While Stegmaier delves into the phenomenon of orientation, Maslow's theory centers on the perspective that individuals are integrated organisms driven by intrinsic needs. Much like the continuous process of orientation, the satisfaction of needs is an ongoing journey that persists throughout life. Maslow characterizes individuals as "perpetually wanting animals,"[10] constantly striving to fulfil their needs, with moments of complete satisfaction being only fleeting.[11]

10 Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," p. 21.
11 Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 25.

Maslow articulates these needs within his framework of *human motivation*, proposing that fundamental physiological needs must be sufficiently addressed before higher-order needs, such as those related to self-actualization, can be pursued. Consequently, each individual's orientation system becomes selective and responsive to their most immediate and pressing needs.

The intrinsic nature of orientation highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing basic needs as a foundation for effective orientation, particularly in challenging situations. Despite all the criticism that Maslow's theory has, the relevance of this hierarchy becomes especially apparent in times of crisis. During such moments, the urgency of basic needs, such as safety or security, often eclipses higher-level aspirations. Understanding the hierarchy of needs is, therefore, essential for comprehending how orientation mechanisms function, as it provides a framework for interpreting how individuals prioritize and respond to their circumstances.

1.2.1. Needs and Motivation

At the most fundamental level, *physiological needs* encompass the essentials required for survival, such as food, water, sleep, shelter, clothing, and procreation. Maslow argues that these basic needs dominate human motivation; when unmet, individuals are primarily driven by the urgency to satisfy them.

Following physiological needs is the *need for safety*, which encompasses the search for security from physical harm and a sense of stability. This need manifests not only in personal safety but also in broader societal contexts. Factors such as a stable work environment and familiar cognitive frameworks — be they philosophical, scientific, or religious — contribute to a sense of comfort and security. Maslow observes that in modern societies, this need is often fulfilled, as individuals are typically shielded from immediate threats such as wild animals or violent crime.[12] However, during crises, when established routines and familiar contexts are disrupted, the need for safety resurfaces with heightened urgency. Maslow links safety to established footholds or "undisrupted routines," a concept that resonates with Stegmaier's notion of stable orientation.[13] When

12 Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," p. 11.
13 Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," p. 9.

these routines are threatened, individuals may experience heightened anxiety and an acute drive to re-establish their sense of security.[14]

The next level in Maslow's hierarchy is the *need for love and belonging*, which encompasses affectionate relationships with partners, family, and friends, as well as connections with like-minded communities. As inherently social beings, humans seek closeness and inclusion, and this quest for belonging fosters feelings of connection and emotional fulfilment.

Following the need for love is the *need for esteem*, which relates to social integration and recognition within society. Maslow distinguishes between two forms of self-esteem: one derived from societal acceptance, which fosters a sense of adequacy and autonomy, and the other arising from the pursuit of reputation or prestige, based on external validation of one's worth. This duality reflects both intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for achievement, and extrinsic drives for social recognition.

At the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy lies *self-actualization,* the drive to realize one's potential and fulfil one's higher purpose. According to Maslow, this journey towards self-actualization begins once lower-level needs are sufficiently satisfied. However, self-actualization is not a final destination but an ongoing process, varying among individuals and influenced by personal ambitions and aspirations. For instance, an artist may prioritize self-fulfillment, even at the expense of physiological or safety needs.

Maslow emphasizes that all needs must be met to a degree deemed satisfactory by the individual. When individuals succeed in fulfilling their needs, they find comfort in newly established plausibilities. Conversely, unmet needs generate discomfort and frustration, often causing temporary neglect of higher-level aspirations. However, once a pressing need is fulfilled, its dominance quickly fades, giving way to new needs.[15]

Certain needs may remain unconscious, with individuals pursuing specific goals without fully recognizing the underlying motivations driving their behavior. Consequently, some decisions may appear irrational or inexplicable through the lens of need fulfilment. While some individuals prioritize higher-order needs, Maslow suggests that, in general, physiological requirements must first be met

14 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 83.

15 Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation,* p. 375, stating that "a want that is satisfied is no longer a want," and hence explaining that we are driven by the unsatisfied needs only.

to a satisfactory level: he attributes these variations to individual "cognitive capacity,"[16] recognizing that preferences for certain needs can vary widely.

In many modern societies, barriers to self-actualization have been reduced through monetary support and social benefits, which alleviate the pressures of physiological needs. This environment fosters self-fulfillment and celebrates diverse expressions of identity. In the Western world, as Maslow acknowledges, the fulfilment of basic needs is often taken for granted due to established societal systems. However, this progress relies on a stable context that allows individuals to orient themselves towards higher-order needs.

During times of crisis, this stability is no longer guaranteed. The security provided by societal norms may diminish significantly, forcing individuals to reassess their personal safety and stability as established structures falter. From the perspective of needs, Maslow emphasizes that when the most basic needs become acute "the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change"[17] with the urgency of fulfilling these needs taking precedence over higher-order aspirations. Similarly, when safety is threatened — whether through physical danger or instability in one's livelihood — individuals are compelled to restore their sense of security.

1.2.2. Directedness of Needs

In his later works, Maslow categorizes human needs into two broad groups: *deficiency-focused needs* (physiological, safety, love, and esteem) and *growth-oriented needs* (self-actualization, and later, aesthetic or cognitive needs).[18] Each of these needs encompasses both deficit and growth dimensions:[19] this distinction is central to understanding orientation during crises, as it highlights the role of needs as motivating factors in the development of orientation mechanisms.

An example of this duality can be seen in the need for love. Its deficiency-focused expression may involve seeking a partner to provide love and affection, whereas its growth-oriented dimension may involve sharing love by becoming a parent or engaging in community activities. Similarly, the need for esteem may begin with the desire to feel adequate and later evolve into a pursuit of

16 Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 15.
17 Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, p.7.
18 Maslow introduces this notion for the first time in his seminal works from 1954 and develops them in later works.
19 See Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, and *Motivation and Personality* to observe theory developments and latest evolutions.

respect, social recognition, and status, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy. The dual nature of needs reflects the fluidity of orientation, which shifts between immediate survival and long-term growth.

Individual motivation as an orientation vector can also be examined through the lens of Higgins' *Regulatory Focus Theory,*[20] which distinguishes between two motivational drivers: *promotion focus* and *prevention focus*. A promotion focus aligns with the potential for growth, closely corresponding to the pursuit of self-actualization and higher-order growth needs. In contrast, a prevention focus prioritizes safety and the avoidance of negative outcomes, aligning closely with Maslow's deficiency-focused needs.

Higgins' concept of *hedonic motivation* — the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain — further underscores the deeply intrinsic nature of orientation, where failure to meet goals results in disappointment or dejection. Orientation as a process succeeds or fails based on the individual's ability to reconcile their internal drives with external circumstances.

While Stegmaier's perspective on orientation and Maslow's understanding of orientation drivers are fundamental to elucidating the mechanisms of orientation, comprehending the complexity of orientation in crises also requires considering an individual's perception of their position in life. The existential philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger, in particular, offer profound insights into the complexities of human orientation, focusing on the interplay between individual perception, meaning-making, and the existential conditions of human existence.

For instance, Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* — the individual's deeply personal and situated experience of "being-in-the-world" (In-der-Welt-Sein) — demonstrates how human orientation arises from the dynamic interplay between external circumstances and the individual's internal perception of their situation. This perspective situates orientation as an inherently existential process, grounded in the individual's engagement with their world and the meanings they derive from it.[21]

Building on Heidegger's groundwork, Sartre's understanding of existential freedom deepens the discourse on orientation. Sartre famously asserts that

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20 E. Tory Higgins, "Beyond pleasure and pain," in: *American Psychologist* 52 (12) (1997).

21 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1962), p. 78-85.

individuals are "condemned to be free",[22] a condition that compels them to take responsibility for the situations. This unavoidable reality of human life necessitates the creation of meaning through deliberate choices and actions. Individuals must confront the uncertainty of existence and actively shape their orientation in response. Here, orientation is profoundly individual, shaped by the unique and momentary constellation of prevailing needs that drive choices and actions.

Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming resonates with Maslow's concept of orientation being driven by either growth orientation — characterized by value creation and the pursuit of self-actualization — or by the urge for safety and conformity. Nietzsche's process of self-overcoming, the continual striving to rise above one's current state, complements this existential framework. For Nietzsche, self-overcoming reflects the individual's innate desire to shape their own life and values. This process underscores the drive to grow, seek fulfilment, and orient oneself towards ever greater possibilities. It transforms orientation from a mere reaction to external circumstances into an expression of the individual's inner will to power and self-determination. In contrast to "herd morality," which blindly follows established norms, Nietzsche celebrates the noble individual who acts out of strength and abundance, determined by their own vision.[23]

Together, these seemingly uncorrelated approaches enrich the understanding of orientation by grounding it in the individual's responsibility, freedom, and capacity for growth. Orientation emerges as a dynamic process shaped by the individual's interaction with their environment, their willingness to embrace responsibility, and their pursuit of meaning and self-transcendence. These human characteristics become particularly significant in responses to crises — complex situations that disrupt established norms, challenge existing values, and compel individuals to reorient themselves in the face of uncertainty.

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22 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* transl. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 509.
23 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality*, transl., with an afterword, by Adrian Del Caro (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), especially pp. 167-197.

2. Crises

Even in stable times, human orientation — driven by diverse individual needs — is a complex process. During a crisis, this complexity is amplified by disruptions of routines, the shattering of stable footholds, and unexpected threats to individual needs and aspirations. Crises engender sudden disorientation; global crises can be defined as situations of simultaneous unsettlement affecting large groups of people.

Crises vary in scope, ranging from personal experiences — such as a midlife crisis — to widespread events impacting entire communities. While every type of crisis can be transformative for individuals, larger crises provide opportunities to observe general approaches to orientation across populations. Historically, crises have been viewed as singular events; however, they increasingly occur simultaneously and with ever-increasing complexity.

Recent global challenges — including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change challenges, technological disruptions, and geopolitical tensions — exemplify crises that are interconnected and systemic in nature.[24] While these crises are unsettling for everyone, they elicit distinct forms of distress and disorientation among individuals. Maslow's theory of motivation provides insight into individual reactions to sudden changes, Stegmaier's philosophy of orientation offers a framework for navigating these situations, and reinforced by the existential perspectives of Heidegger, Sartre, and Nietzsche, the deeply personal and meaning-driven aspects of orientation during crises can but emphasize individual's active role in shaping their response to uncertainty and disruption.

2.1. Health Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly threatened basic physiological needs, as identified by Maslow, and fundamental human *homeostasis*, while also endangering the need for safety. Initially, limited understanding of the virus triggered fundamental protective mechanisms across the population, specifically the urge for self-preservation. The perceived health threat activated basic

24 See Didier Wernli / Lucas Böttcher / Flore Vanackere / Yuliya Kaspiarovich / Maria Masood / Nicolas Levrat, "Understanding and governing global systemic crises in the 21st century: A complexity perspective," in *Global Policy Wiley Publishing* 14 (2), (2023). See also World Economic Forum. "Global Risks Report 2023, 18th Edition," in: *WEF, 2023*.

protective responses; as Maslow noted, reactions to physiological threats are among the most intense because no other need is as fiercely defended when endangered. People panicked and sometimes aggressively sought to protect their lives, even at the expense of social interaction and closeness. Beyond threats to basic physiological needs, typically stable needs—such as social status and job security—were suddenly at risk. Alongside fears for their lives, individuals faced job losses and financial instability.

In this state of individual disorientation, people sought guidance from trusted sources and relied on government instructions. As the pandemic progressed and clarity increased, new individual orientations emerged, fostering innovative, growth-oriented solutions. Health protection measures evolved into routines, allowing people to adapt their behaviors and expectations. Although specific needs varied, deficiency needs dominated especially during the pandemic's early stages, with individuals prioritizing protective actions over growth-oriented aspirations.

2.2. Climate Crisis

As Maslow described, momentarily prevailing needs shape perceptions of the future. The climate crisis presents another recent global challenge impacting human orientation.[25] Unlike the immediate, almost palpable threat posed by COVID-19, the dangers associated with climate change are still less perceptible in daily life, not easily grasped and distant. Consequently, individuals are less inclined to address a less tangible and immediately threatening vision of a potential environmental crisis, and are more concerned with their immediate needs. This is further complicated by the current political climate, where skepticism can cloud public understanding and willingness to act.

In the case of climate change, where the threat to life is not as intermittent, limited understanding of the possible consequences of inaction exacerbates uncertainty and thus results in inaction. This lack of comprehension makes individual assessment of the potential threats impossible and impairs any active handling. The hypothetical dire consequences of climate change only encourage actions that arise from a promotion focus and are based on the potential for growth instead of immediate action, as is often the case when addressing

25 See United Nations, "Climate Action," in: *United Nations*, 2023.

imminent need. This is often reflected in political rhetoric that prioritizes economic growth over environmental concerns.

This dissonance is particularly evident in discussions between developed and developing nations.[26] While developed countries may advocate for climate initiatives, developing nations often grapple with poverty alleviation and lack the resources to implement sustainable practices. For developing countries, lower-level needs take precedence over collaborative efforts to address climate issues. This dynamic is often exploited in political debates, with some arguing that climate action unfairly burdens developing nations.

In this context, at the individual level, someone with a strong sense of belonging may engage with sustainability efforts differently than someone whose primary concern is achieving safety from environmental hazards. In group contexts, prevailing moral norms can guide attention; however, unsatisfied lower-order needs may overshadow collective efforts toward sustainability. This is further complicated by the polarization of political discourse and differences in societal opinions, further dividing individual opinions, complicating individual orientation, and hindering widely accepted norms that result in action.

2.3. Technological Disruption

Technological advancements also pose a threat of potential crises for society. The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and related new-generation technologies threatens not only low-skill jobs, as was initially feared, but also raises questions about high-skill professions across various sectors, including legal and financial services.[27] This disruption can threaten both the need for safety and esteem needs, as some professions may become redundant, and others might lose their relevance or prestige in the near future.

As job losses loom and professional reorientation becomes necessary, uncertainty about future directions creates additional disorientation. Without clear guidance or existing footholds to rely on, individuals may look to others for

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26 See United Nations, "Achieving Sustainable Development Requires Solidarity," in: *UN Press 2023, October 4* https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaef3585.doc.htm, accessed on October 15, 2023.

27 See Bernard Marr, "The 15 Biggest Risks Of Artificial Intelligence," in: *Forbes* 2023 from https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2023/06/02/the-15-biggest-risks-of-artificial-intelligence/, accessed October 19, 2023. See also Jan Hatzius, "The Potentially Large Effects of Artificial Intelligence on Economic Growth (Briggs/Kodnani)," in: *Goldman Sachs Research 26 March 2023*, from https://www.gspublishing.com/content/research/en/reports/2023/03/27/d64e052b-0f6e-45d7-967b-d7be35fabd16.html; accessed on October 19, 2023.

direction in navigating these changes. Although there may not be an immediate threat to life, advancing technologies like AI have still the potential to undermine living conditions and societal structures,[28] which force not only individuals but even governments to reorient in search of new societal paradigms and widely acceptable norms.

While societal-level containment measures, similar to the actions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic might help ease individual orientation stemming from technological disruption, it remains unclear what effect these developments will ultimately have on basic human needs, tremendously complicating the assessment of any possible deficiency-based orientation. This unpredictability simultaneously opens opportunities for innovative solutions while fueling anxieties about the potential erosion of individuals' most basic needs.

2.4. Geopolitical and Economic Tensions

Just as individuals and groups orient themselves towards one another at all times, nations and countries also navigate their relationships amid fierce competitive pressure over influence, resources, and dominance of any sort. Leaders steadily face dilemmas balancing national interests with global needs in an intricate, complex setting of conflicting interests and under the continuous threat to their image and social status. Along with other global crises, current geopolitical tensions contribute further to uncertainty about the futures. The economic landscape risks spiraling into a global financial crisis reminiscent of 2008 due to factors such as inflation and resource scarcity. These challenges create an environment where demographic changes and cost-of-living crises compound existing issues without clear solutions in sight.

Demographic changes and cost-of-living crises exacerbate these challenges, creating an environment of mounting uncertainty and dwindling plausibilities. This phenomenon, described as "polycrises,"[29] reflects the overlapping and interrelated nature of contemporary global challenges. Individuals must navigate this complex landscape while contending with their own unmet needs.

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28 Frederik Federspiel / Ruth Mitchell / Asha Asokan / Carlos Umana & David McCoy, "Threats by artificial intelligence to human health and human existence," in *BMJ Global Health* 8 (2023).
29 World Economic Forum, "Global Risks Report 2023, 18th Edition," p. 57.

3. Orienting Oneself in Crises

During a crisis, the individual needs that drive the orientation process undergo sudden shifts, leading to distress from changes in motivation and the loss of familiar mechanisms. Unlike daily life, where orientation is relatively stable, crises heighten perceptions of danger and compel individuals to adapt their actions and perspectives. The realization that every action may lead to unforeseen results further destabilizes individuals. Stegmaier likens the orientation process in crises to a hunt, where the hunter risks becoming prey; "while viewing the situation, we are 'moved' by the situation itself,"[30] illustrating how the mutual influence of actions and outcomes intensifies during crises due to increased urgency and risk.

Heidegger's notion of "being thrown or thrownness (*Geworfenheit*)"[31] suggests that individuals are cast into a world not of their choosing. Orientation, then, involves making sense of this thrownness and navigating the constraints and possibilities it presents. This concept resonates with Sartre's focus on existential freedom and the individual's responsibility to create meaning, regardless of the limitations imposed by presently prevailing needs. This struggle for orientation may ultimately transcend into Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming and Maslow's concept of self-actualization as a process of personal growth.

The perceived threat and lack of stable footing hinder the orientation process, while emotional distress complicates matters by impairing cognitive clarity. As a result, the orientation process may be skewed by biases or may take longer, leading to suboptimal outcomes. Responses to crises vary widely; some individuals confront challenges directly, while others seek guidance or withdraw altogether. Typically, actions begin with addressing immediate deficiencies before evolving into aspirations for growth. Unmet needs necessitate immediate action, but once fulfilled, they create space for higher-level pursuits that guide orientation even in challenging times. In situations characterized by multiple crises, conscious acts of orientation demand greater mental acuity and the ability to overcome deficiency needs while striving for growth.

Thus, the ability to recognize one's needs and clearly distinguish between deficit and growth needs becomes pivotal during crises. Beyond mere awareness of needs, successful navigation of challenges requires individuals to first achieve

30 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 36.
31 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174.

a sense of calm before devising effective strategies. Acknowledging uncertainty can itself act as a stable foothold, enabling individuals to accept that any act of orientation may result in either success or failure. By recognizing the limitations of previously reliable footholds, individuals can develop new mechanisms that do not depend solely on past experiences.

3.1. Crisis Orientation and Group Morals

Although orientation is fundamentally an individual process, it does not occur in isolation. It transpires within specific contexts that involve intrinsic orientation, as well as orientation towards other individuals and groups. In distressing situations, group orientation becomes particularly significant. When individuals lack a clear orientation system while attempting to address deficiencies in their needs, they may find temporary relief by mimicking the coping strategies of others and aligning themselves with groups in their orientations.

From an anthropological perspective, individual behavior reflects the operational paradigm within a society or collective. The need for belonging is integral to social interactions and is rooted in the survival instincts of ancestral tribes, where acceptance was essential for survival. Vulnerable or aggressive individuals were frequently exiled from their tribes, facing peril as a result, while those who were valued or respected secured their place within the community. Other needs developed through continuous interactions within groups and between individuals, eventually becoming intrinsic to human behavior. Stegmaier describes such an orientation, where an individual operates in the interest of the group, as internalized "moral coercion."[32] This moral coercion, along with sacrifices of personal interests, has become normalized in societal interactions and is instilled from childhood, fostering mutual reliance in collective orientation processes.

Maslow's theory of basic needs aligns with this understanding: shared norms assist individuals in securing their place in society while fulfilling evolving human needs. Once integrated into personal identity, these norms shape behaviors and reinforce group belonging. In ambiguous situations lacking sufficient experience for orientation, individuals often seek guidance from others to form groups with shared values shaped by their responses to crises.

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32 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 207.

When established orders collapse and existing structures no longer provide meaning, situations may arise where the environment suddenly becomes hostile, and familiar routines are upended. In such contexts, group belonging may fail to deliver the expected support. Consequently, despite the ease of group orientation and our inherent desire to belong, some individuals may develop new techniques rather than merely imitating others. Crises compel individuals to confront their authentic selves and re-evaluate their priorities, enabling them to establish new frameworks of meaning. Those driven by growth needs often take the lead in orienting others, becoming innovators and leaders in uncertain times.

3.2. Directedness in Orientation: Orientation Innovation

Stegmaier's concept of "markets of moralities"[33] is particularly relevant to understanding how new orientation mechanisms are established. The process of moral innovation — the creation and adoption of new morals — can be compared to the function of free markets: just as products and companies compete for dominance in liberal societies, morals also enter a form of competition for acceptance. The most contextually appealing morals gain traction, influencing larger populations and becoming dominant without requiring constant reaffirmation. This dynamic highlights how moral systems evolve alongside societal needs and values.

Stegmaier's approach to understanding moral evolution suggests that individuals who transcend deficiency needs and focus on growth have the potential to become orientation innovators during crises. These individuals, through their ability to navigate uncertainty and provide direction, can ascend to what Stegmaier terms "moral authority."[34] Such figures guide others by establishing new routines, which, over time, evolve into guiding principles for larger groups. These principles eventually solidify into societal norms — what we collectively recognize as morals. This process seamlessly combines individual orientation techniques with shared needs and beliefs, enabling groups with similar values to compete in the markets of moralities, striving to establish their ideals as universally accepted standards.

Becoming an orientation innovator, however, requires more than superior skills; it demands a well-developed sense of morality and a capacity to address

33 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* pp. 213-220.
34 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* p. 216.

the complexities of crises. Recent crises underscore the necessity of recalibrating actions to align with group interests and needs. Yet, the individuality of moral perceptions complicates the understanding of what is "good" or "bad," as crises reshape individual orientations within the already fluctuating markets of moralities. This underscores the ongoing tension between personal interests and collective norms, which becomes particularly pronounced during periods of uncertainty.

3.3. Directedness in Orientation: Orientation Morality

Individual orientations towards group morals play a pivotal role in shaping collective identities and driving ongoing moral innovation in societies that are in a state of constant flux. Since crises exacerbate unmet individual needs, personal interests often overshadow commonly accepted social norms. Consequently, the task of judging decisions as right or wrong becomes increasingly fraught amid shifting ethical standards. The markets of moralities continuously evolve to accommodate changing individual needs at societal levels, demonstrating how crises accelerate both individual growth and global dynamics. In an interconnected world, shared interests and values emerge but simultaneously add layers of complexity to orientation processes.

Universally accepted guiding principles influence individual decisions, making the process of orientation dependent on factors beyond the inherent drive to satisfy exclusively individual needs. Crises disrupt these universal morals, as disconnection, polarization, and social tensions intensify. When unmet needs dominate orientation, personal interests take precedence, weakening the authority of social norms. Disconnection has become one of the defining problems of contemporary society, making social tensions, the polarization of communities, isolation, and "othering" inherent aspects of current crises.[35]

From the perspective of the differentiation between morals and ethics, judging someone's decisions as right or wrong becomes exceedingly difficult. This is particularly true given the ever-evolving understanding of what is considered ethical at a given time and the shifting nature of morals amid crises. Crises, therefore, act as a crucial for moral re-evaluation, forcing individuals

35 David E. Kirklan, *The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences, and Solutions*, edited by N. Way, A. Ali, C. Gilligan, & P. Noguera "(New York: New York University Press: 2018)"

and societies to confront the fragility of established norms and the necessity of moral innovation.[36]

4. Effective Orientation Principles

Despite apparent similarities in individual experiences during crises that affect larger groups, the mechanisms of orientation differ significantly depending on prevailing needs and an individual's capacity to orient him or herself. Orientation is, at its core, a deeply personal experience, shaped by the unique interplay of individual needs and circumstances. However, these intricate processes are often described through extreme simplifications that distil them into overarching principles of orientation innovation. While such simplifications serve to identify general patterns, they risk overlooking the nuanced and dynamic nature of individual orientation.

– *Individual Needs and Orientation Mechanisms:* Individuals driven by fundamental needs in their deficit expression — such as those outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs — tend to rely on existing orientation mechanisms, often directing their focus towards external sources such as groups or media. These individuals prioritize immediate survival or security, making them more dependent on established norms and structures. In contrast, those motivated by growth-oriented needs adopt a more complex approach, incorporating both group and global orientation techniques into their individual strategies. This paradoxical selectivity, where individuals unconsciously exclude evident signs or alternative sources of support based on their immediate needs, reflects the mind's tendency to narrow its focus under pressure. When pressing demands dominate attention, orientation becomes constrained by limited knowledge, increasing susceptibility to biases and inefficiencies. Crises further exacerbate this dynamic, testing both an individual's capacity to orient him or herself and their ability to innovate new mechanisms in challenging and uncertain contexts.

– *Evaluating Orientation Efficiency:* While the outcomes of individual orientations cannot be universally judged as good or bad, their efficiency can be evaluated based on the results they produce. An efficient orientation is one that minimizes limitations and maximizes adaptability. On an individual level, people are often faced with what Heidegger distinguishes as the choice between authentic and

36 See again Stegmaier's definition of moral innovations in *What is Orientation?,* p. 216.

inauthentic modes of orientation. In moments of crisis, individuals are compelled to deliberately choose and take responsibility for their decisions: either to re-evaluate their priorities and adopt new patterns of orientation (authenticity), or to conform to societal norms without critical reflection (inauthenticity).

While both approaches may deliver the desired sense of calm or stability, and thus be considered effective in some contexts, choosing authenticity allows individuals to transcend inherited norms and innovate new mechanisms of orientation. This, in turn, can lead to the establishment of new paradigms and norms, offering not only personal growth but also the potential to influence broader societal evolution.

4.1. Principles for Effective Orientation

During crises, mediating apparently diverging stakes becomes a central task. Observing to find meaning, allowing the context to influence oneself, and recognizing one's ability to shape the situation emerge as dominant preconditions for effective orientation.[37] A shift towards self-awareness in orientation creates a necessary distance from the immediate situation, alleviating distress, providing stabilization, and enabling conscious re-orientation.

– *Acknowledging the bounded capacity of orientation:* Recognizing the limitations of orientation is crucial, as threats to fundamental needs direct attention towards protecting endangered aspects of life. Consequently, orientation becomes restricted to addressing the most pressing needs, often at the expense of other essential elements within the broader context. Time pressure further constrains this capacity, reducing the effectiveness of already limited decision-making processes.

– *Comprehending individual needs:* Understanding one's needs is vital during crises, as they may jeopardize previously satisfied requirements while also threatening currently aspired ones. Identifying specific needs affected by a crisis provides transparency to the situation, enabling individuals to better navigate their circumstances. This comprehension not only shapes the course of orientation but also reveals potential biases, ineffective footholds, and alternative pathways.

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37 See Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, pp. 36-38, for more details on the situational aspects of orientation.

– *Giving time some time:* Orientation during crises often takes longer than expected or is prone to errors, leading to frustration. While immediate action is necessary in situations posing imminent threats to health or safety, other contexts may benefit from deliberate reflection. Although it may seem counterintuitive or paradoxical, allowing time for reflection in non-urgent situations can improve decision-making and enhance one's ability to navigate the crisis effectively.
– *Embracing uncertainty:* Unmet needs and the absence of reliable orientation mechanisms generate significant distress. Crises not only threaten fundamental needs but also disorient individuals, creating a sense of urgency that exacerbates the difficulty of orientation. In such contexts, orientation itself becomes a need. Acknowledging the lack of clarity in unfamiliar situations can offer relief, as it removes the burden of unrealistic expectations.
– *Broaden perspectives*: Footholds, routines, leeways, and other orientation tools often stem from either individual knowledge and expertise or trust in others' effective strategies. Expanding one's perspective and embracing complexity can reduce uncertainty and open up new possibilities for decision-making. Stegmaier refers to this as "overlooking the situation," in the sense of gaining a comprehensive view of the entire context while simultaneously acknowledging gaps in one's understanding.
– *Innovating orientation:* While disorientation is often perceived as a threat, it can also serve as a catalyst for creativity. Breaking away from personal routines can inspire innovative approaches to orientation. For instance, artists often process and express their experiences of crises through creative means — whether physical, cognitive, emotional, or introspective. These efforts break habitual patterns, channeling thoughts and emotions into new mechanisms for navigating crises. If successful, such innovative approaches can evolve into established processes that benefit not only the individual but also others.[38]
– *Coping with distress and uncertainty:* Coping with the distress caused by uncertainty and the absence of effective orientation mechanisms is essential during crises. Contrary to expectations of ease, repeatedly relying on familiar patterns that are no longer effective amplifies frustration and deepens disorientation. Instead, crises should be reframed as opportunities to develop new orientation mechanisms better suited to turbulent conditions. Addressing

38 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, pp. 90-91.

uncertainty involves challenging established routines and questioning previously unquestioned plausibilities when they cease to produce successful outcomes.
– *Embracing sovereign orientation:* Crises often disrupt externally guided coping mechanisms, such as those based on social norms or group reliance. The inefficiency of these external mechanisms can naturally enforce a shift towards self-directed, sovereign orientation. While urgency may drive self-interest, growth-oriented needs inspire a more balanced approach that integrates personal aspirations with concern for others. This shift towards self-awareness and growth fosters the potential for re-orientation, even in the face of multiple crises.

By recognizing individual needs, embracing uncertainty, and broadening perspectives, individuals can enhance their capacity for effective orientation amidst adversity. Developing new orientation mechanisms not only guides the individual but also offers valuable insights for others, fostering collective resilience and adaptability in turbulent times.

5. Philosophy and Crises

The central premise of this paper may appear deceptively simple: individuals are driven by their needs, and the nature of these needs, combined with the context of orientation, determines the success of that orientation in providing a sense of ease. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs elucidates the inner motivations of individuals, while Stegmaier's orientation philosophy offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the processes of orientation. However, the conscious application of these frameworks does not guarantee optimal outcomes, as the inherent complexity of human nature resists reduction to any singular model. Crucial elements, such as transcendence or peak experiences — often neglected in such discussions — may hold significant implications for the orientation process. Despite these simplifications, the interplay between triggering needs and orientational mechanisms, particularly when approached with conscious awareness, can greatly enhance the ability to navigate crises effectively.

Motivations for orientation are deeply individualized, varying across people, groups, and cultures. While needs are pivotal, they represent only one of many factors influencing individual orientation. As Maslow and his critics have noted, needs fluctuate depending on environmental, situational, and cultural conditions and may emerge simultaneously or in a dynamic hierarchy, rather than in a

linear order.[39] Consequently, achieving optimal orientation requires recognizing the interconnectedness of diverse factors — both internal and external — and leveraging these to establish effective footholds. A nuanced understanding of individual needs, combined with an awareness of the orientation process — including subconscious routines, cognitive shortcuts, footholds, leeways, and the inherent potential for disorientation — can alleviate decision-making stress and positively shape future perspectives.

As Stegmaier asserts, "orientations are always reorientations." [40] Crises, rather than being merely disruptive, should be understood as mobilizing forces that drive societal progress. Individual orientations that transcend personal needs and contribute to the collective good are instrumental in reinforcing this trajectory of progress, aligning personal well-being with societal evolution. While individuals naturally gravitate towards familiarity and comfort, their orientations are not isolated acts; they inevitably influence and shape societal norms, moral frameworks, and collective values. This dynamic underscores the transformative potential of orientation — not only as a means of achieving personal ease but also as a mechanism for collective advancement.

By internalizing the fundamental principles of orientation and applying them consciously during times of crisis, individuals can navigate uncertainty with greater efficacy, build resilience, and inspire meaningful change. This conscious understanding itself becomes a stabilizing foothold, offering a sense of comfort and confidence amidst turbulence. It empowers individuals to approach crises not merely as obstacles to overcome or damage to control, but as opportunities for growth, exploration, and the reimagining of both personal and collective futures.

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39 Louis Tay /Ed Diener, "Needs and subjective well-being around the world," in: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2) (2011) to discover how the perceptions of needs vary across the countries, also see later works by Maslow on this subject.

40 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?* p. XIII.

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III.

Overview of Historical Polycrises – A Comparative Analysis of Their Causes and Ways of Overcoming Them

by Dirk Stemper, Germany

Abstract: This chapter explores crises' historical and philosophical dimensions, proposing a framework for orientation rooted in lessons drawn from historical polycrises and Nicholas of Cues' insights. It highlights the importance of tentative thinking and "docta ignorantia" (learned ignorance) as tools to navigate the complexities of the 21st century. The chapter aims to link these insights with practical applications for addressing the challenges posed by contemporary interconnected crises.

1. Defining Crisis and Polycrisis – Complex Challenges and the Evolution of Global Paradigms

1.1. Crises

Crises can be described as follows:[1]

- Specific, unexpected, and non-routine events
- High levels of uncertainty
- Threat or perceived threat to high-priority goals

1 Seeger, Sellnow, und Ulmer, "Communication, Organization, and Crisis," p. 231.

Crises are typically triggered by an extreme discrepancy between desired and existing states, which is perceived as a threat.[2] The severity of the perceived threat is related to the compromised goals and the probability of loss.[3]

Crises catch orientation off guard and are characterized by surprise due to the sudden confrontation with the aforementioned non-routine circumstances.[4] The short response time adds to the complexity and challenges associated with crises.[5]

In addition to this concept, Hans Blumenberg rightfully emphasizes the loss of orientation in a crisis.[6] In this sense, a crisis is not just a state of emergency or upheaval but a loss of already gained footholds of orientation, leading to a fundamental disorientation challenging our understanding of the world and our place in it.

1.2. Overlapping Crises as Loss of Already Gained Clues of Orientation

Therefore, multiple intersecting crises can be described as existential disorientation, where one no longer knows what to do, feels lost, and experiences a state of considerable confusion.[7] That, in turn, may lead to a sense of despair, including a struggle to find one's bearings and a profound sense of vulnerability.

1.3. Polycrises

As humanity progresses through the 21st century, it faces multifaceted concerns, both in isolation and with interconnected implications.[8] In the face of all these challenges, there is an urgent need for effective governance in an interconnected and rapidly changing world, including the requirement for international cooperation and the reform of global institutions.[9]

The single macro-crisis resulting from concurrent, interrelated breakdowns in numerous global systems is called a polycrisis. The phrase relates to systemic

2 Seeger, Sellnow, und Ulmer, "Communication, Organization, and Crisis," p. 233.
3 Seeger, Sellnow, und Ulmer, "Communication, Organization, and Crisis," p. 234.
4 Seeger, Sellnow, und Ulmer, "Communication, Organization, and Crisis," p. 235.
5 Seeger, Sellnow, und Ulmer, "Communication, Organization, and Crisis," p. 234.
6 Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*, p. 24.
7 Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Orientierung*, p. 312.
8 Homer-Dixon et al., "A Call for an International Research Program on the Risk of a Global Polycrisis," p. 6.
9 Roubini, *Mega Threats: Ten Dangerous Trends That Imperil Our Future, and How to Survive Them*, pp. 43–45.

risks and is defined by the aforementioned deterioration of crucial ecological and social systems, harming humanity's possibilities irreparably. A polycrisis is then, in general, a worldwide crisis brought on by interconnected systemic failures propelled by positive feedback loops and amplified by the expansion of human activity's scope and connection in complex systems.

Complex, nonlinear behavior in social and natural systems leads to changes in these systems, sometimes becoming excessively large (or tiny). The presence of many stable states or equilibria separated by thresholds is a significant cause of that nonlinearity. When feedbacks in crucial processes that maintain system equilibrium changes from negative to positive – i.e., from self-dampening to self-reinforcing causal loops – a system may undergo a critical transition or tipping event. Four different mechanisms that can cause the nonlinear instabilities seen in global systems have been identified via research on the causal dynamics of complex systems. These mechanisms include cascade failure, contagion, critical transitions, and adaptive failure. They may work separately, in tandem, or successively. Moreover, the growth of positive feedbacks is an additional factor influencing the appearance and synchronization of many crises.[10]

1.4. Lessons from Historical Polycrises

Historical case studies offer valuable insights into how societies have responded to crises. Below is an expanded analysis of key examples:

Throughout the past, crises such as wars, famines, and pandemics have occurred almost without exception simultaneously, exacerbating their impact on societies. Therefore, throughout history, humans have repeatedly been forced to orient themselves during tumultuous times, and important lessons can be drawn from their experiences. By examining historical crises and the strategies employed by individuals and societies, we gain valuable insights into how to navigate the complexities of the current age.

10 Homer-Dixon, et al., "A Call for an International Research Program on the Risk of a Global Polycrisis," p. 4.

Table 1: Some Notable Historical Polycrises

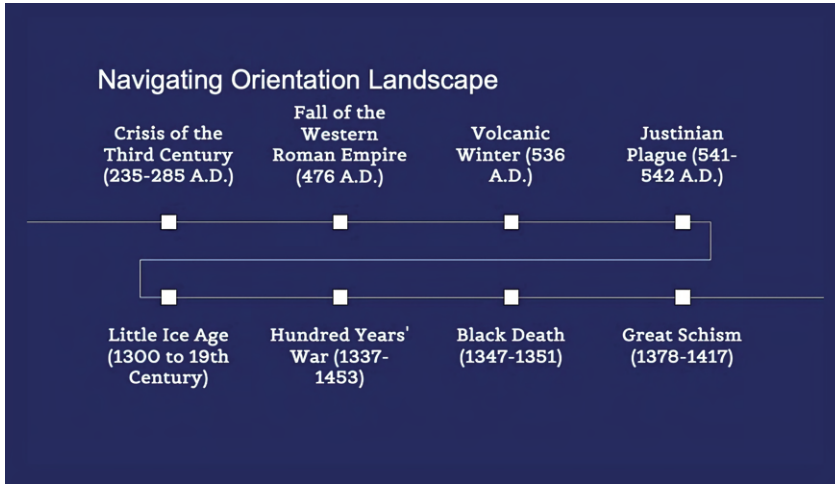
Period	Primary Components	Core Impacts	Recovery/ Transformation
Late Bronze Age Collapse (1200-1150 BCE)[11]	• Severe climate change (drought) • Systemic trade collapse • "Sea Peoples" invasions • Earthquakes • Social upheaval	• Nearly all major Mediterranean and Near Eastern civilizations collapsed • Loss of writing systems • Mass abandonment of cities • Destruction of palace economies • Trade networks disintegrated	• Took several centuries • Led to emergence of new political systems • Sparked Iron Age innovations • New trade patterns emerged • Alphabetic writing spread
Crisis of the Third Century (235-284 CE)[12]	• Economic collapse • Cyprian Plague • Multiple civil wars • Germanic invasions • Climate cooling	• Roman Empire nearly dissolved • Hyperinflation • Military anarchy • Urban abandonment • Trade disruption	• Diocletian's reforms • Transformation to Dominate • Military reorganization • New economic system • Changed the nature of Roman rule
Late Antique Crisis (536-545 CE)[13]	• Triple volcanic eruptions • Global temperature drop • Justinian Plague • Agricultural collapse • Trade disruption	• 18-month solar dimming • Up to 50% population loss in some regions • Widespread famine • Collapse of multiple societies • Trade network breakdown	• Restructuring of the Mediterranean world • New power centers emerged • Agricultural adaptations • Changed settlement patterns • Religious transformations
Maya Classic Collapse (8th-9th centuries)[14]	• Severe droughts • Environmental degradation • Elite competition • Trade disruption • Population pressure	• 90-99% population loss in some regions • Collapse of divine kingship system • Abandonment of monumental architecture • Loss of complex writing / calendar use • Breakdown of long-distance trade networks	• Shift to council-based governance • Rise of new centers in Yucatan • Simplified writing/art forms • Focus on coastal and water-rich areas • Development of new trade networks focused on coastal routes

11 Ledger et al., "The Palaeoenvironmental Impact of Prehistoric Settlement and Proto-Historic Urbanism."
12 Harper, *The* Fa*te of Rome*.
13 Büntgen et al., "Cooling and Societal Change during the Late Antique Little Ice Age from 536 to around 660 AD."
14 Kenneth, et al., "Development and Disintegration of Maya Political Systems in Response to Climate Change."

Period	**Primary Components**	**Core Impacts**	**Recovery/ Transformation**
Global Crisis of 17th Century[15]	• Little Ice Age • Worldwide revolts • Economic depression • Colonial disruptions • Multiple famines	• Multiple empires collapsed • Global trade disruption • Mass migrations • Agricultural failures • Political transformations	• Rise of nation-state system • New economic models • Scientific Revolution • Colonial restructuring • Military innovations
Ming Dynasty Collapse (17th century)[16]	• Little Ice Age • Economic breakdown • Peasant rebellions • Manchu invasion • Disease outbreaks	• Dynasty overthrow • Mass population loss • Agricultural collapse • Social order breakdown • Urban destruction	• Qing Dynasty establishment • New social structures • Military reorganization • Land system reforms • Cultural synthesis
The Year Without Summer (1816)[17]	• Tambora volcanic eruption • Global temperature drop • Agricultural crisis • Economic disruption • Mass migration	• Crop failures across the Northern Hemisphere • Summer frosts in Europe and N. America • Food riots • 100,000+ deaths • Global food price crisis	• Relatively quick recovery (2-3 years) • Agricultural diversification • Invention of bicycle • Cultural/artistic impacts • New weather study methods

15 Parker, *Global Crisis*.
16 Liu, "The reason behind the collapse of Ming."
17 Stothers, "The Great Tambora Eruption in 1815 and Its Aftermath."

All major civilizational collapses listed here were preceded by what we now recognize as polycrises — multiple, interconnected catastrophic events that created cascading effects across societies. As defined earlier, a polycrisis fundamentally differs from a catastrophe. Polycrises represent complex, interconnected challenges that unfold across multiple domains of society, potentially resulting from catastrophic events.



1.5. Orientation amidst Tapestries of Crises

When we examine the above-listed historical examples, a pattern of further characteristics emerges:

1. Economic disruption feeds political instability, creating social unrest and a feedback loop that amplifies the original economic challenges. This interconnectedness makes traditional crisis management approaches insufficient.
2. Unlike catastrophes with clear beginning and end points, polycrises often develop gradually and persist through multiple phases. The boundaries between different crisis elements blur, creating crisis continuums, sometimes lasting more than 100 years.
3. Contemporaries fail to recognize polycrises as unified phenomena, instead experiencing them as separate, unrelated catastrophes. This perceptual and discursive fragmentation hinders effective responses and delays necessary adaptations.

1.6. Patterns of Orientation in Historical Polycrises

A fascinating pattern emerging from historical analysis is how societies overcome polycrises through cultural innovation. These innovations aren't merely technological — they represent fundamental shifts in how societies organize, think, and operate. Our analysis suggests patterns in the examples of how societies successfully navigate through polycrises:

1. Recognition and Reframing
    - Initial denial gives way to collective awareness
    - Crisis narrative shifts from fragmented to systemic understandings
    - New frameworks emerge for understanding complex challenges
2. Innovation Acceleration
    - Crisis conditions accelerate the adoption of novel solutions
    - Cross-pollination of ideas across different domains
    - Emergence of new institutional forms
3. Cultural Adaptation
    - Development of new social norms and practices
    - Evolution of collective problem-solving approaches
    - Integration of technological and social innovations
4. Institutional Transformation
    - Reform of existing institutions
    - Creation of new organizational structures
    - Development of more resilient systems

Yet, these comparative insights indicate that, next to the common traits, there must also be differences between successful and failed responses to systemic crises.

1.7. Successful vs. Failed Responses

The Roman Empire's Crisis of the Third Century (235-284 CE):[18]

Initial Conditions:

- Political instability (multiple emperors)
- Economic collapse
- Pandemic (Cyprian Plague)

18 Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750*.

- External military threats

Successful Response Elements:

- Diocletian's administrative reforms
- Currency stabilization
- Military reorganization
- New political framework (Tetrarchy)

Long-term Impact:

- Transformation into Late Roman Empire
- Enhanced institutional resilience
- New governmental structures

The Ming Dynasty's Crisis (17th century):[19]

Initial Conditions:

- Climate change (Little Ice Age)
- Agricultural collapse
- Financial instability
- External threats

Failed Response Elements:

- Rigid institutional structures
- Resistance to innovation
- Centralized control
- Limited adaptation capacity

Outcome:

- Dynasty collapse
- Societal transformation under a new regime

1.8. Key Differentiating Factors

1. Institutional Flexibility

Successful societies demonstrated the ability to reform existing institutions
Failed responses are often characterized by institutional rigidity
Innovation capacity closely tied to institutional adaptability

19 Liu, "The reason behind the collapse of Ming."

2. Cultural Openness
Successful societies showed a willingness to adopt new ideas
Failed responses often marked by cultural isolation
Innovation adoption speeds varied significantly
3. Leadership Approaches
Successful responses featured adaptive leadership
Failed responses often showed rigid, traditional leadership
Leadership quality impacted innovation adoption rates
4. Resource Management
Successful societies effectively mobilized available resources
Failed responses often marked by resource depletion
Resource distribution patterns impacted recovery potential

1.9. Lessons from Historical Comparison

1. Timing Matters
   - Early recognition of the systemic nature of the crisis
   - Swift implementation of reforms
   - Proactive rather than reactive responses
2. Innovation Integration
   - Successful societies integrated innovations across domains
   - Technical and social innovations combined
   - Cultural adaptation accompanied by technical change
3. Social Cohesion
   - Maintained social stability during the transformation
   - Balanced change with continuity
   - Protected vulnerable populations
4. Knowledge Transfer
   - Preserved and transmitted critical knowledge
   - Adapted external innovations
   - Maintained institutional memory

Thus, understanding historical polycrises provides valuable insights for analyzing current global challenges:

1.10. Key Lessons

The Importance of Systems Thinking

1. Recognition of the interconnected nature of challenges
2. Need for holistic response strategies
3. Value of cross-domain collaboration

The Role of Cultural Innovation

4. Importance of social and cultural adaptation
5. Need for new frameworks and paradigms
6. Value of collective learning and knowledge sharing

The Power of Cultural Transformation

7. Crisis as a catalyst for positive change
8. Importance of maintaining hope and vision
9. Role of leadership in guiding cultural transformation

The challenges we face today may be unprecedented in their scope, but the historical record shows that human societies possess a remarkable capacity for adaptation and renewal. In conclusion, historical polycrises reveal one consistent pattern: societies that survived and thrived after the analyzed crises were those that responded with cultural innovation and systemic cultural transformation.

These insights are remarkably similar to contemporary engineering approaches to complexity, uncertainty, and instability.[20] Understanding these patterns helps us recognize that current global challenges, while daunting, also present opportunities for profound positive transformation. The key lies in identifying the systemic nature of challenges and responding with equally systemic innovations.

2. Philosophical Perspectives on Crisis Orientation and Transformation – Philosophical Insights from Nicholas of Cues

Philosophical perspectives on orientation and crises dive into the rich tapestry of human experience, offering frameworks to make sense of our place in the world, especially when it seems to be falling apart. Yet, only by individuals

20 Rosenthal und Jones, *Chaos Engineering*.

orienting themselves towards each other do general orientations arise, although they never wholly overwrite the leeway for individuality.[21]

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, Nicholas of Cues turned out to be a thinker of extraordinary originality. Here, his thinking will be summarized in the context of how to orient oneself in times of multiple crises and of the previously described insights derived from historical examples.

Living between 1401 and 1464 during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, he had to face several interconnected crises himself: crises of financial, sociopolitical, theoretical, and personal nature.

Nicholas of Cues managed to bring the bishopric of Brixen, of which he was both the spiritual and secular leader, out of debt and into a surplus through his business acumen and financial skills. However, he lost everything to Sigismund, Archduke of Austria. This loss made Nicholas reason that it is more pleasing to God to give to the poor than to store up wealth. Consequently, he established an endowment for a hospital in Kues for the poor.[22]

Next, Nicholas of Cues lived in a time of significant historical changes. As mentioned, the late Middle Ages were marked by political instability, social unrest, and religious conflicts. Nicholas of Cues actively participated in ecclesiastical and church politics.

As a prominent clergyman in the 15th century, Cues entered several debates and controversies regarding the church's legitimacy and the role of a council in relation to an uncontested Pope. At the Council of Florence, held between 1431 and 1449, where he played a significant part in the deliberations that intended the reunion of the Eastern and Western churches, Cues' efforts aimed to foster dialogue and understanding between the two factions and overcome the divisions between them.[23]

Likewise, he actively participated in the discussions surrounding the Hussite negotiations, which led to a lengthy and bitter battle between those who wanted to transfer or dissolve the council and the pope's supporters.[24]

Furthermore, Cues devoted himself to reforming the Roman clergy as the vicar-general of the Papal States and called for a synod to address these reforms. He even composed a "General Reform of the Church" document, examining

21 Stegmaier and Mueller, *Fearless Findings: 25 Footholds for the Philosophy of Orientation*, p. 81.
22 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. 23.
23 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. 124.
24 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. XXIV.

even the pope himself with the inspectors he appointed. However, his reform efforts faced opposition from the Curia and were ultimately unsuccessful.[25]

Unfortunately, despite his dedicated efforts, Cues' attempts at reform faced significant resistance in all these situations.[26] Nonetheless, all these historical and biographical facts should seem grounds enough to bring him into the analysis of how to orient oneself when facing multiple crises.

In crises, such as those Cues experienced in his life—including the Black Death, religious conflicts, and social upheaval—*docta ignorantia* would serve as an orientational approach to reflect on one's ability to recognize and become aware of human knowledge's limits. That would mean that in crises, individual orientation should abandon insistence on absolute knowledge or correct answers in favor of hermeneutic openness to the unknown and uncertain. It fosters a humility towards knowledge and a receptivity to new insights.

2.1. The Framework: Tentative Thinking and Conjecture

2.1.1. Conjecture and *Docta Ignorantia*

Conjecture (*coniectura*) is a form of tentative thinking that can assist orientation in the face of multiple crises by providing a method for exploring and finding solutions amidst uncertainties and challenges rather than a reductionist search for certainties. In sum, borrowing the terminus from the theological tradition dating back to Saint Augustine – he argues that genuine understanding and knowledge can only be attained through a mixture of knowledge and ignorance.[27] It invites orientation to persist in its processes of continuously evaluating and adjusting its strategies and approaches based on new information and changing circumstances, even under the threat of possible catastrophes.

In Cues' metaphysical thinking, conjecture is closely connected with *docta ignorantia*, or "knowing ignorance." Nicholas of Cues emphasizes the concept of *docta ignorantia* as a way to demarcate from medieval scholasticism and the abundance of knowledge produced by it during that time. Unlike the Socratic notion of "I know that I know nothing," the Cusanian formulation of *docta ignorantia* states, "I know through knowing nothing." Amid various forms of

25 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. 125.
26 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. 93.
27 Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, p. 70.

knowledge, there emerges a not-knowing that testifies to the power of an object that is beyond what one can know.[28]

Thus, conjecture is considered the mental activity appropriate to *docta ignorantia*. It serves as a methodology aligned with *docta ignorantia*, indicating that truth cannot be defined as a complete alignment of object and understanding. Instead, it recognizes the necessity of grasping the dissimilarity and resistance of metaphysical objects to being fully understood.[29] The truth found through conjecture is not about approximation but rather participation in the insurmountable difference, commonly referred to as the "ontological difference" in modern philosophy.[30]

Cues sees in *coniectura* an active participation in the truth, which cannot be understood merely as a mere guess, but as a way to grasp the truth in its diversity and complexity.

Therefore, at first glance, the Cusanian concept formation may appear arbitrary and unstable in its tentativeness, but it reveals a principled caution upon closer examination. Cues keeps his concepts "fluid," ensuring their ability to accommodate the last effort of the idea, the *coincidentia oppositorum*. The *coincidentia oppositorum* is the structural principle governing three central objects of his work: the concept of God, cosmology, and Christology. It signifies the reversal of the way the world emerged from God, emphasizing the unity from which multiplicity and contrariety arise.

The human mind, while producing a multitude of concepts, cannot overcome their inherent multiplicity. Therefore, there must be a constant reminder that the forefront of truth lies in the inexact, avoiding the congealing of concepts into self-satisfied and self-sufficient structures. By maintaining a cautious and flexible approach to concept formation, Cues preserves the capacity for *coincidentia oppositorum*, or the ability to hold opposing ideas in unity. That enables the philosopher to avoid falling into superficial knowledge or fatal ignorance and remain open to the deeper truths of reality.[31]

In concepts of the philosophy of orientation, tentative thinking could easily be understood as a practical means of conscious thinking in front of multiple

28 Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, p. 71.
29 Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, p. 186.
30 Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, p. 187.
31 Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, p. 73.

alternatives in the face of crises, of maintaining self-irritation in thinking, through which our orientation can create and control alternatives.[32]

2.1.2. Human Cognition as Conjecture

Therefore, Cues' *coniectura* presents a rather radical perspective on human cognition in general and orientation in particular, arguing that all human assertions about truth are conjectures due to our finite nature's limitations.[33] This notion stems from Cues' recognition of the inherent gap between human understanding and absolute truth:

- All positive human assertions about truth are conjectures.[34]
- The finite nature of conceptual frameworks limits human cognition.[35]
- The growth of truth perception is inexhaustible, yet infinite truth remains unattainable.[36]

2.1.3. Limitations of Human Knowledge in Philosophical Thought

Cues emphasizes the boundaries of human knowledge, particularly when it comes to understanding the divine or infinite:

- Our knowledge is essentially human and cannot reveal absolute truth.[37]
- Human concepts and categories are inadequate for grasping the nature of the divine.[38] (ibid.)
- The intellect, not being truth itself, will never understand truth completely.[39]
- Cues argues that infinite truth is fundamentally beyond human reach: The infinite is precisely that which cannot be measured and, therefore, cannot be an object of the mind as a measurer.[40]

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32 Stegmaier and Mueller, *Fearless Findings: 25 Footholds for the Philosophy of Orientation*, p. 103.

33 All quotations from Nicholas of Cues follow the complete and text-critically verified text of the works of Nicholas of Cusa in the original language, as published since 1928 on behalf of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities by the publishing house Felix Meiner, Hamburg, and made available digitally with translations on the Cusanus Portal. "Cusanus Portal," De coniecturis I, sec. 2, 1–5. http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeConi_1 01/21/2025

34 "Cusanus Portal," De coniecturis I, sec. 2, 3-4. http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeConi_1 01/21/2025

35 "Cusanus Portal," De docta ignorantia I, sec. 3, 10 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeDoctaIgn_9 01/21/2025.

36 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.

37 "Cusanus Portal," De beryllo, sec. 6 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeBeryl_1 01/21/2025.

38 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.

39 "Cusanus Portal," De docta ignorantia III, sec. 10 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeDoctaIgn_9 01/21/2025.

40 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.

- Absolute infinity is not contractable in any form, making it impossible to describe God with one single attribute accurately.[41]
- The lack of proportionality between the finite and the infinite is due to infinity encompassing all possibilities.[42]

2.1.4. Truth as Principle and Measure in Human Understanding

For Cues, truth serves as both the principle and measure of human cognition:

- Truth is not the goal but the principle and measure of human cognition.[43]
- Fulfillment comes from seeking truth, not possessing it.[44]
- The pursuit of truth is endless, emphasizing the process over the attainment.[45]

2.1.5. Interdisciplinary Connections

Cues' work demonstrates a rich tapestry combining frontline scientific achievements of his time with a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach:

- He draws connections between mathematics, cosmology, and theology.[46]
- His ideas incorporate elements from Aristotelian metaphysics and Platonic psychology.[47]
- His work reflects influences from medieval mysticism and Renaissance humanism.[48]

2.1.6. The Role of Imagery and Analogies in Explaining Complex Philosophical Concepts

Cues employs various metaphors and analogies to elucidate his philosophical ideas – particularly conspicuous examples are his three "Layman"-Dialogues.[49]

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41 "Cusanus Portal," De docta ignorantia II, Abschn. 1 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeDoctaIgn_90 01/21/2025.
42 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.
43 "Cusanus Portal," De docta ignorantia I, Abschn. 3, 10 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeDoctaIgn_9 01/21/2025.
44 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.
45 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.
46 "Cusanus Portal," Trialogus de possest, Abschn. 44 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/fw.php?werk=335 & fw=44 01/22/2025.
47 "Cusanus Portal," De beryllo http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeBeryl_1 01/22/2025.
48 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, p. XXII.
49 "Cusanus Portal," Idiota de mente, http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeMente_48, Idiota de sapientia http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeSap_1, Idiota de staticis expermimentis http://

- He uses images and analogies to explain concepts that cannot be directly expressed.
- Mathematical analogies are frequently used to illustrate theological insights.
- His familiar analogies help make abstract philosophical ideas more accessible.

2.1.7. God-likeness of the Human Mind: Cues' Central Analogy[50]

A key concept in Cues' philosophy is the analogy between the human mind and the divine:

- The human mind is seen as a "second God" or a "humanized God."
- This analogy emphasizes the creative power of human cognition.
- The mind's ability to create concepts is likened to God's creation of real things.

By reframing truth-seeking as a process rather than a goal, Cues offers a perspective that remains relevant in modern philosophical inquiry. His emphasis on the limits of human knowledge, the use of analogies, and the importance of continuous truth-seeking provides a foundation for approaching complex philosophical questions with humility and curiosity.

www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=DeStatExper_161 01/22/2025.

50 "Cusanus Portal," De beryllo, sec. 7 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/fw.php?werk=7 & fw=7 01/22/2025.

2.2. Practical Implications for Contemporary Crises

While autobiographical material detailing how he personally applied *coniectura* and *docta ignorantia* specific crises in his life is lacking, his stance can be inferred from his Christology and its integration of philosophy and theology to demonstrate at the same time how these concepts can be applied to understanding crises.

1. *Humility:* Conjecture and learned ignorance reflect a recognition of the limits of human knowledge, allowing for engaging with uncertainties and more profound insights and ultimately for navigating personal and intellectual crises.
2. *Application of Principles:* Embracing the limitations of knowledge and accepting that not all questions have clear or definitive answers encourages flexibility and openness to new perspectives, which have been crucial for the analyzed historical examples. By acknowledging what they do not know (*docta ignorantia*), individuals can pursue wisdom and understanding by continuously seeking and questioning rather than solely relying on established facts or beliefs.[51]
3. *Balance between Knowledge and Ignorance:* Cues argued that true understanding arises from recognizing the balance between knowledge and ignorance. He believed faith and reason are not mutually exclusive but can enrich one another when approached correctly. This framework declares that acknowledging one's limitations in knowledge (*docta ignorantia*) leads to a more profound grasp of divine truths and the nature of existence. The interplay of "*coniectura*" encourages individuals to hypothesize and explore possibilities within their faith and reasoning, promoting a dynamic understanding rather than static dogma. He purports that true knowledge recognizes the limitations of human comprehension, suggesting that the nature of God and ultimate truths might be fundamentally unknowable.

Docta ignorantia offers a perspective that makes it possible to accept the limitations of human knowledge while continuing the search for knowledge. Cues uses these approaches to find orientation and express his thoughts in times of complex and uncertain circumstances, such as his time's political and religious upheaval. His reflection on the human mind, which operates

51 Offermann, *Christus, Wahrheit des Denkens*, pp. 18-19.

between sensual, rational, and reasonable cognition,[52] makes it possible to accept the limits of knowledge as part of the cognitive process.[53] Cues' ideas thus provide a framework for a philosophy of uncertainty and the search for more accurate knowledge, characterized by reflection and critical thinking rather than dogmatic assertions.

The ideas of Nicholas of Cues, especially in his works such as *The Layman on the Mind* and *De docta ignorantia*, find specific applications in various areas of contemporary philosophy. These areas include:

2.2.1. Epistemology

Cues' approach to knowledge, which emphasizes the importance of "docta ignorantia" (instructive ignorance), influences modern discussions about the nature of knowledge and the limits of human cognition.

- *Un-Knowability of things:* Cues' emphasis that things, as they are in themselves, are fundamentally unknowable allows for recourse to the idea that the knowing subject plays an active role in the constitution of the object of knowledge.
- *Conjectural nature of knowledge:* Cues argues that knowledge is not absolute but is achieved through a dynamic process of approximating the truth that can never be fully completed. That challenges understanding knowledge and insight as something static and promotes a view that sees knowledge as always in motion.
- *Creative potential of the human mind:* The human mind's God-like creativity sees the human being capable of producing ideas through its intellectual activity. These ideas are not simply reflections of a given reality but results of man's creative thinking.
- *Dialectic between faith and knowledge:* In exploring the relationship between faith and knowledge, Cues argues for a unity of the two, regarding faith as an indispensable component of the cognitive process. That allows for the development of an integrated epistemology that connects spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

52 "Cusanus Portal," Idiota de mente, Chapter 7, sec. 100 http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/fw.php?werk=28 & fw=100 01/22/2025.
53 "Cusanus Portal," ibid.

- *Significance of ideas as epistemological factors:* The role Cues attributes to ideas in the human cognitive process as instruments of self-knowledge emphasizes that ideas are necessary in human cognition to ensure the naturalistic traits of the cognitive process and to clarify the relationship between language and ideas.

Overall, Cues' epistemology represents a significant contribution to a dynamic, creative, and integrative understanding of knowledge that contrasts static and dogmatic models.

2.2.2. Hermeneutics

In hermeneutics, particularly in the work of thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, the influence of Cusanian ideas is evident. Gadamer emphasizes the universal accessibility of hermeneutic experience, which parallels Cues's views on the human mind's capacity for intuitive knowledge.[54]

2.2.3. Philosophical Theology

Cues' integration of Christology into philosophical inquiry is also addressed in contemporary theological philosophy. The emphasis on the connection between philosophy and theology in Cues' work is relevant to the modern discussion of the dialogue between faith and reason.[55]

2.2.4. Anthropology and Ethics

The idea that the layman (*idiota*) can attain true knowledge and the critical reflection on education and knowledge influence anthropological studies and ethical theories that discuss the role of individual knowledge in contrast to institutional knowledge.[56]

Cues' notion illustrates a shift from rigid scholastic models of knowledge to a more nuanced understanding that incorporates creativity and insight. This idea aligns with the philosophy of orientation that prioritizes inquiry

54 Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register (Gesammelte Werke 2)*, p. 441.
55 Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 56.
56 Winkler and Mandrella, "Der antigelehrt philosophierende Laie (De mente c. 1)," p. 14.

and exploration over dogmatic assertions and emphasizes the role of human experience in shaping understanding.

In conclusion, the philosophies of Cues not only highlight essential aspects of knowledge and ignorance but also invite a dialogue that encourages a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in human orientation and the pursuit of truth, making them highly relevant in contemporary philosophical discussions about orientation in the face of multiple crises.

2.3. Hermeneutic Recursivity of Orientation in Polycrises

Tentative thinking and "knowing through not knowing" creates – by orientation's recursivity[57] – a hermeneutic cycle: a circular process of understanding and interpretation in the situation of the situation, involving the fusion of historical and contemporary horizons, where orientation brings their own biases, prejudices, and preconceptions to the interpretation and adjusts them in the light of situation's meaning. Understanding polycrises is an ongoing dialogue between orientation's horizon and the situation itself;[58] it emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between orientation's pre-understanding and the interpreted situation and highlights the necessity of engaging in a continuous dialogue to arrive at a more in-depth understanding.

The cyclic orientation processes, as discussed here, are closely connected to the notions of conjecture and orientation in the face of multiple crises. They refer to a back-and-forth movement between understanding the whole and interpreting the parts and vice versa. They bridge the gap between the past and the present, between actual and previous crises, and their different cultural contexts.

That cycle of tentative thinking acknowledges that truth in orientation cannot be a fixed and objective endeavor. Instead, it is an iterative, active, and creative engagement with a crisis at hand. It involves continuously making assumptions, formulating hypotheses, and developing conjectures about the meaning and significance of the object of study.

While crises are, moreover, an inevitable aspect of orientation itself, the construal of these crises will be negatively influenced by the limitations of language, a lack of historical distance, and the complexity of the subject matter.

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57 Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Orientierung*, p. 156.
58 Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register (Gesammelte Werke 2)*, pp. 59-60.

In the face of these crises, an interpretive framework or perspective through which the orientation engages with the situation must involve a conscious awareness of biases, preconceptions, and situatedness.

Only with that kind of mindful orientation can we navigate through crises, instrumentalizing the iterative cycle of Cusanian tentative thinking as a methodological framework for interpretation and conjecture for creative engagement and the generation of new insights while avoiding mere opinion.

Through conjecture, one can approach crises by acknowledging and engaging with the unknown and the unknowable. This kind of knowledge is even characterized by its very incomplete nature. It is based on preliminary information yet goes beyond mere opinions or conclusions formed on incomplete information, as typically understood in modern usage. Human knowledge is limited because it is based on our perception and understanding of the world, which is always incomplete and imperfect. Thus, as our knowledge is bound to actual things and their individual and social representation, particularly in front of multiple crises, no orientation will grasp with any certainty the essence of critical situations precisely as they are.

However, while our knowledge may be limited and uncertain, it can still participate in the truth as it is. And even with human knowledge always being conjectural and provisional, it still allows for successful orientation by generating meaning. In front of multiple crises, the latter can be understood as the ability of an individual to effectively navigate and adapt to their environment based on various factors. It involves establishing a sense of direction, purpose, and understanding in one's life. That includes spatial orientation, such as finding one's way in a physical space using maps and compasses, and more abstract forms of orientation, such as understanding one's values, goals, and priorities in life. Successful human orientation also considers an individual's physical and psychological well-being. Factors such as health, physical abilities, and mental state can influence a person's ability to navigate and make decisions in their environment. These elements, too, play a role in shaping an individual's perspective and possibilities for action.[59]

Furthermore, all successful human orientation involves interacting with others and establishing meaningful connections within a social and cultural context. That includes being aware of and adapting to the needs and conditions

59 Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Orientierung*, p. 200.

of others, as well as finding common ground and shared values with those around them. Interpersonal relationships and a sense of community contribute to a successful human orientation.[60]

Ultimately, a successful human orientation is a dynamic process combining self-awareness, adaptability, and a sense of connection to one's surroundings. It allows individuals to navigate their lives with a sense of purpose, direction, and fulfillment, enabling them to make meaningful choices and pursue their goals.

In the context of an orientation in the face of multiple crises, conjectural, tentative thinking serves as a tool to connect truths with the generation of meaning. At the same time, it involves considering various possibilities, experimenting with different approaches, and being open to revising one's course of action based on feedback and outcomes. By adopting a joint tentativeness in thinking, individuals can adapt to the complexities and uncertainties that arise during times of crisis. Tentative thinking – though open – focuses on bringing out an argument or idea's true strength and potential.

That is not simply about being right, defending, or persuading, but rather about thoroughly examining and developing the argument in order to reveal its inherent strength. This type of argumentation requires a profound understanding of the subject matter and an ability to consider opposing viewpoints objectively. It involves carefully considering the objections and counterarguments raised by others and addressing them in a way that enhances the original argument. It is not about overpowering or dismissing opposing views but instead engaging with them in order to strengthen one's own position. Strengthening ("Stärkermachen") is closely related to dialectic tentative reasoning, which involves critically analyzing and evaluating arguments in order to arrive at a more profound understanding of the truth. It is through this dialectical process that the true strength of an argument can be brought forth. It seeks to uncover and develop the inherent strength of an argument by engaging with opposing viewpoints and critically evaluating them. Furthermore, it is a process of continuous examination, refinement, and improvement in order to arrive at a stronger and more convincing position.[61]

It allows one to navigate through existential disorientation and crises by providing a means to explore new perspectives and possible meanings. It allows

60 Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Orientierung*, p. 316.
61 Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik (Gesammelte Werke 1)*, p. 373.

for the exploration of alternative pathways and the challenging of established assumptions and beliefs. By embracing this type of thinking, individuals can better cope with the uncertainties and anxieties associated with crises and find new ways to reorient themselves in their lives. Calm thought and rational thinking allow for a measured and reflective approach, which is essential in understanding and responding to crises.[62]

Rather than succumbing to fear or hysteria, conjecture encourages us to engage in thoughtful analysis and dialogue, seeking rational solutions to our challenges. Thus, it can turn protonormativity into flexible normativity. In the face of multiple crises and uncertainties, the recognition of knowing ignorance enables individuals to refrain from demanding absolute certainty as a prerequisite of orientation. Instead, conjectural knowledge serves as the only valid and meaningful form of knowing. It protects orientation from desperate doubt or sterile ignorance.

This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and uncertainties of the world, enabling individuals to navigate crises with greater adaptability and resilience.

Therefore, genuinely seeking solutions in the face of a polycrisis, first of all, involves the act of questioning or inquiring into the subject matter. Orientation must be characterized by an ability to bring forth the unknown to open up possibilities while revealing the uncertainty and fragility of the knowledge generated. Open questions are essential for genuine understanding and interpretation, particularly in the context of orientation. They require orientation to be receptive, open to different perspectives and interpretations, and engage recursively with the complexity and ambiguity of the subject matter. Orientation must aim to explore and delve deeper into the matter at hand, seeking to uncover new insights and shed light on different aspects.

2.4. Navigating Today's Complexity

Through experience, orientation recognizes the limits of its ability to predict and control the future and the uncertainty inherent in life. It realizes the inevitable divergence of personal and world time. Acknowledging limitations allows for a deeper self-understanding and a sense of unity with oneself.[63] The experience

62 Blumenberg, "Einleitung," p. 16.
63 Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register (Gesammelte Werke 2)*, p. 504.

of limitation leads to humility and the recognition that one does not have all the answers, resulting in a more authentic and self-aware existence.

In this perspective, the concept of conjecture acts as a bridge between the finite human mind and the infinite complexity of any situation – multiple crises included – maintaining a sense of connection with what is beyond human understanding, providing a foundation for successful orientation amidst the threat and uncertainty of those crises. That way, conjecture and knowing ignorance offer a valuable framework for both reason and thinking. By embracing the limitations of human knowledge, orientation will approach its temporality and inevitable uncertainty with humility and openness, engaging in conjectural thinking to explore possibilities and navigate complexities.

Humility plays a vital role in our intellectual and personal development. It reminds us that no one has all the answers and that there is always more to learn. Embracing humility, in addition to tentative thinking as described here, allows us to acknowledge our limitations and seek knowledge and wisdom from others. It encourages us to listen to diverse viewpoints and engage in constructive dialogue, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect.

This perspective fosters adaptability and resilience instead of knowing-all certainties in times of crisis. Orientation in front of multiple crises needs to turn into an "experience" that is an ongoing process of acquiring knowledge and meaning. It involves challenging and negating existing knowledge. It is an experience of limitation that leads to self-unity by recognizing the limits of one's understanding and embracing humility. Through experience, individuals continually grow and develop their knowledge and understanding of the world. It presupposes orientation in diverse fields, drawing parallels and contrasts with historical strategies.

Adopting a Cues-inspired approach to orienting decision-making, policy formulation, and societal adaptation can have several practical implications. Here are some key points to consider:

– *Embracing complexity* encourages orientation to move away from simplistic and reductionist thinking and avoid reductionist dualistic scenarios for future development when facing the interconnectedness and interdependencies of crises. By acknowledging complexity, decision-makers can develop more comprehensive and nuanced strategies that address the multifaceted nature of societal challenges.

– *Integrating multiple perspectives* endorses the inclusion of various stakeholders and experts from different fields. By incorporating numerous perspectives,

decision-makers can gain a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand and develop more inclusive and effective solutions.
– *Balancing tradition with innovation* avoids both the trap of futile fortune-telling and the trap of unhistorical absolute narcissism, striking a balance between tradition and innovation. Disengaging from reductionist collective symbolism must build upon the strengths of the past while adapting to the changing needs and circumstances of the present.
– *Emphasizing ethical considerations* encourages orientation to prioritize ethical principles and values when navigating multiple crises. That ensures that individual actions align with broader societal values and promote the well-being of individuals and communities.
– *Fostering adaptability and resilience* encourages orientation to develop flexible and responsive strategies to changing circumstances. By fostering adaptability and resilience, decision-makers can better navigate uncertainties and unexpected events, ensuring that policies and decisions remain adequate and relevant over time.

This approach will allow for more comprehensive, inclusive, and ethical outcomes. By embracing rather than dreading complexity, integrating multiple perspectives, balancing tradition and innovation, emphasizing ethical considerations, and fostering adaptability and resilience, we can navigate the complexities of the 21st century and address the challenges that define our era.

2.5. Transitions and Reflections

This historical overview demonstrates all the insights the philosophy of orientation provides already in its framework, embracing complex interactions among personal, social, and historical dimensions – perfectly applicable in the context of polycrises.

Nicholas of Cues's ideas about conjectural knowledge emphasize the importance of engaging with incomplete information and the limits of human understanding. This perspective can be beneficial in real-world polycrises, where decision-makers must navigate uncertainties and rapidly changing situations. For example, conjectural thinking allows individuals and societies to develop flexible responses to crises by acknowledging the unknowns. It encourages a measured approach to decision-making rather than succumbing to fear, enabling people to seek rational solutions in times of uncertainty.

Moreover, Cues' emphasis on practical knowledge relevant to everyday life provides a framework for understanding contemporary challenges. By examining historical crises through the lens of conjectural knowledge, individuals can gather insights from past crises and adapt their strategies, leveraging historical lessons about the dynamics of social change, particularly how historical processes and crises can inform contemporary responses. This examination highlights that social experiences are shaped by historical problem-solving narratives, suggesting that understanding past crises leads to improved coping mechanisms in current and future situations. Specifically, Rahel Jaeggi notes: "life forms instantiate reactions to problems [...] a sequence of problems or crises and their (more or less successful) resolution, from which the historically subsequent problems arise."[64]

That implies that analyzing historical crises not only reveals how societies have dealt with challenges but also suggests that these lessons can be utilized to address current issues effectively. The document emphasizes that crises indicate the failure of existing problem-solving frameworks, which demands reevaluating strategies and practices, thus enabling a more informed approach to contemporary calamities.[65]

Moreover, social change often arises from conflicts stemming from crises, and such transformations can be influenced by the lessons learned from historical events.[66] Thus, applying conjectural knowledge derived from history enables individuals and societies to adapt and potentially avoid repeating past mistakes while navigating present crises.

This chapter underscored the importance of adaptability, humility, and collaboration in navigating polycrises by synthesizing historical lessons and philosophical frameworks. Historical analysis demonstrates that societies integrating systemic thinking and innovative strategies thrive amidst uncertainty. Nicholas of Cues' concepts, particularly *docta ignorantia* and *coniectura*, provide invaluable tools for fostering cultural transformation and meaningful action. In a world defined by interconnected crises, these lessons are not only relevant but essential for shaping a sustainable future.

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64 "In Lebensformen instanziieren sich […] Reaktionen auf Probleme […] eine Abfolge von Problemen oder Krisen und deren (mehr oder weniger gelungener) Bewältigung, woraus sich die historisch nachfolgenden Problemstellungen ergeben." (Transl. by the author) Jaeggi, *Fortschritt und Regression Kindle Edition*, pp. 160-161.

65 Jaeggi, *Fortschritt und Regression, p*p. 147-148.

66 Jaeggi, *Fortschritt und Regression,* p. 155.

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SECOND PART:
PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

IV.

From Disorientation to Scientific Co-Orientation

by Yuri Di Liberto, Italy

Abstract: Our current predicament is characterized by the cooccurrence of heterogeneous and multilayered critical processes. The turn of the previous century has confirmed and progressively established a status quo for global humanity in which multiple crises seem to coexist without a clear solution: from the Anthropocene to the financial crisis of 2007-8, from the perils of desertification and overexploitation of soil to the potential labor market crisis generated with the advent of AI, from the looming threat of potential large scale conflicts to the perils of zoonotic spillovers and pandemics.

The philosophy of orientation comprises a set of theoretical tools to reflect upon orientation itself as a key structural requisite of human beings. By putting its core insights into dialogue with ideas and concepts belonging to the field of psychoanalysis, critical economic theories and the social epistemologies of scientific activities, this paper aims at showing how the philosophy of orientation describes key processes of disorientation in critical situations. Moreover, we will also suggest the implicit presence, in the philosophy orientation itself, of an antidote to polycritical disorientation in the form of a knowledge or scientific cooperation.

1. Disorientations

1.1 The Age of Multiple Crises

Our present era can be characterized as a conjuncture of crises. We've been through the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, climate change is still ongoing, environmental collapse is still a present threat and, moreover, geopolitical instabilities have recently become new wars (i.e., the current Russia-Ukraine conflict).

The social responses to these calamities are heterogeneous, although they often share some commonalities as for the basic emotional and affective responses they elicit. The intrinsic phenomenology of these critical events vary from case to case. For example, while war and its destructive effects are perceived in a more contracted and dense time-span, fraught with sudden manifestations such as explosions or the collapse of entire buildings, the destructive effects of climate change are instead distributed along a continuum, with sudden local manifestations swarming here and there on the surface of our world as a reminder that a more general and slow destructive process is unfolding in the background.

Oftentimes, it is only through such codified and formalized means that entities such as governments or institutions can "perceive" the reality of a crisis. The actions that may or may not follow to face such problems are also dependent on how the registration of the reality of a crisis is quickly translated into effective practices. However, what should be emphasized here is the difference between what "crisis" means for an individual or small group on the one hand, and, on the other, for an institutional entity or government.

Crises mean different things depending on the level of observation/perception. The mismatch between the official means of formal registration of a crisis and those at the level of the individual and the collective further reflects other general differences. For example, the *speed* of perception of a crisis is also different. In the case of events such as the already mentioned ecological collapse, the person who lives in a rural area immersed in nature may perceive the pernicious effects more quickly than any official body.

The official acknowledgement of the reality of a crisis may come sometimes incredibly late if compared to the concrete perception by a situated human agent who actually lives and experiences the crisis firsthand.

This mismatch can go, in some cases, also the other way around. For example, in the case of economic crises such as the 2007-2008 financial collapse, the institutional "data-keepers" and some insiders of the banks involved, knew with some anticipation of the imminent collapse and avalanche of effects.

In terms of Stegmaier's philosophy of orientation, the way a crisis is codified, perceived and/or registered, depends also heavily on the *standpoint* one adopts. According to Stegmaier:

> The standpoint of an orientation is the (metaphorical) 'point' one 'stands' on in a horizon and from which one sees and understands what one can see or understand within this horizon. This could be a geographical, political, scientific, moral, religious, or any other type of standpoint; in each case one can 'enter' it and 'leave' it, 'adopt' it or 'abandon' it. In this respect, one can 'have' multiple standpoints at once.[1]

Orienting oneself in a given situation, be it *normal* or *critical*, is an operation inevitably linked to the nature of the starting point of view (or standpoint). Moreover, Stegmaier acknowledges the qualitative difference between types of standpoints, namely the standpoint of a singular embodied human being *versus* all the other more refined or complex standpoints mentioned in the quoted passage. The first, embodied and individual standpoint, is for him that of "*one's own body in the world*."[2] It goes without saying that this is the only standpoint one cannot 'adopt' or 'abandon' just like with other standpoints. The radical and absolute nature of this bodily standpoint is such that, no matter how far further complexifications go (through technique, knowledge, etc.), the reference to the first person and bodily standpoint represents "the reference and starting point for any kind of orientation."[3]

The outward (and ego-centered) movement of perception from the subjective standpoint is molded by the concrete and felt state of one's own body and psyche. Put in different terms, orientation is partly dependent on one's firsthand self-perception of his/her possibilities and limits.

But if this is the *absolute* qua bodily standpoint, what about the other more abstract and often culturally/technically mediated standpoints? We need to

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1 Werner Stegmaier, *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation*, trans. R.G. Mueller (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 44-45.
2 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 45.
3 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 45.

acknowledge here both commonalities and differences. In particular, Stegmaier acknowledges that the standpoint from which we orient ourselves is always bound by particular types of *time* and *space*. Time and space vary, moreover, depending on the type of entity we're dealing with. In other words, Stegmaier acknowledges the fact that orientation and standpoints are also *scale sensitive*. The time of biological rhythms is not the same as the time of institutional procedures, the time scheduled by cults, "which shape cultures in specific ways"[4] is not the same as, for example, geological times. The time of brain's neurophysiological rhythms — think about Circadian rhythms — is not the same as the time of evolutionary selection, although the two are co-occurring simultaneously at the same time, on different levels.

1.2 Orientation in Crisis: The Shrinking of The Horizon

According to Stegmaier, orientation can be defined as "the *achievement of finding one's way in a situation to make out opportunities for actions to master the situation*."[5] It is important to underline here the presence, in this definition, of some key words and concepts which correlate directly to orientation itself, namely *situation* and *action*.

As a correlate of orientation *situation* means the set of organized perceptual and also non-perceptual givens in which one is inevitably always immersed. Since every moment of our life constitutes a situation, there's no out-of-situation: we flow more or less drastically, more or less smoothly, from one situation to another. As both embodied and symbolic species, bounded at the same time to our most proximate needs and also to our most distant preoccupations, we are constantly dealing with situations in the *here and now* ('how do I provide myself food today?'), but also as future-oriented goals or aims ('Will I be able to pay the bills at the end of the month/year?').

What is crucial to underline, then, is that "orientation only becomes noticeable when it no longer works."[6] It is the failure of achieving something which signals a short-circuit in orientation: the automatic *circuit* involving orientation-situation-action is broken, there's a mismatch between the grasping of the given situation and the outcome.

4 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 51.
5 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 5.
6 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 6.

In Stegmaier's framework, any orientation comes always with a certain degree of (minimal) irritation. Since we orient ourselves in always changing situations, orientation is itself a dynamic and not completely stable process characterized by being always in 'perpetual agitation.' Irritation, as a feature of orientation, is then a basic mood (*Stimmung*) which brings tonalities to a given situation. The degree of irritation, i.e., the type of mood or tuning, also determines how we experience particular situations.

In particular, if unsettlement increases "it can grow into *anxiety* or *angst*; and if the anxiety continues, it may even become *despair* (*Verzweiflung*)." In such circumstances, doubts (*Zweifel*) "about one's own opportunities to 'get by' may grow and then paralyze all action" and, moreover, "if the desperation persists, it may result in *depression*: i.e. the pressing-down' of all prospects for coping with one's life."[7]

In the age of critical processes such as pandemics, wars and climate change, this concept becomes particularly evident, especially when we deal with climate change. Indeed, a recently published global survey on the issue of climate anxiety, shows that 59% of respondents across the entire globe were "very or extremely worried" about climate change, and that 84% at least "moderately worried."[8]

Contemporary findings and theories about the psychology of climate change also shed light into another important aspect, namely that of the pernicious effects of virtual (not yet happened) future threats as sources of higher degrees of irritation. It is lurking threats such as a possible worsening of climate conditions which generate a general state of anxiety which is in turn detrimental to our minds and bodies.[9]

Moreover, according to the *Climate Psychology Alliance*, this chronic state of climate anxiety can "disrupt normal patterns of sleep and rest, leading to a continuous state of hyper-arousal."[10] Since in orientation "*the present consists of*

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7 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 30.

8 Caroline Hickman et al., "Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: A global survey," in: *Lancet Planet Health*, 5(12), 2021, pp. e863.

9 See Jo Hamilton, "Emotions, reflexivity and the long haul: what we do about how we feel about climate change," in *Climate psychology: On indifference to disaster*, ed. P. Hoggett, (London/New York: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 153-176; Head, Lesley, *Hope and grief in the Anthropocene* (New York/London: Routledge, 2016); Weintrobe, Sally, "The difficult problem of anxiety in thinking about climate change," in *Engaging with climate change: Psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*, ed. Sally Weintrobe (New York/London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 33-47; Weintrobe, Sally, "Moral injury, the culture of uncare and the climate bubble," in *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 34(4), 2020, pp. 351-362.

10 Climate Psychology Alliance, *Handbook of Climate Psychology*, (2022). https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/index.php/component/content/article/climate-psychology-handbook?catid=15&Itemid=101#flipbook-flip5/1/.

relevant matters from the past for the future,"[11] it becomes philosophically crucial to understand and describe what happens if the future itself is envisaged not as *open*, but rather as *closed*.

A further conceptual clarification is here mandatory. For Stegmaier, the future is structurally the *opening* of possibilities due to the fact that the present, on which the future depends, is also itself to a certain extent, *open*. The future somehow inherits part of the *openness* of the present, and the contingency of possible actions in the here-and-now translates almost by definition into the panoply of possible future scenarios.

So what does it mean to say that in a present fraught with threatening possibilities, the future is closed? Given the structural analysis we borrow from Stegmaier, this certainly doesn't mean that the future is *non-existent* or that it closes in an absolute sense, since the tension between present and future is a constitutive feature of orientation. Rather, what we mean with "closed future" is the idea that the *horizon* is *pulled* more and more closer to the subject's own standpoint in orientation. The horizon, therefore, can be metaphorically conceived of as a malleable membrane whose shape and radius are also dependent on contingent factors (which also imply 'mood,' for example, as Stegmaier highlights).

1.3 Defense Mechanisms against Disorientation

Let's move, for a moment, from climate change to war. In his book, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, W. G. Sebald famously investigated the psychological effects on the German people of the devastating bombings carried out by the British Air Force during the Second World War, and specifically in 1942. Through the study of contemporary publications, statements of direct witnesses, and reports by knowledgeable persons, Sebald shows also what kinds of collective and individual defense mechanisms were active in order to deal with the unimaginable destruction. Such (heterogeneous) psychological mechanisms constituted ways to endure the almost unfathomable level of destruction inflicted on civilians and buildings.

Although that was obviously a situation of warfare in which both sides were subjected to damage, loss and the possibility of annihilation, the case at

11 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 28.

hand analyzed by Sebald is particularly illustrative for our purposes. According to historical data, the Royal Air Force alone dropped 1 million tons of bombs on enemy territory, 600.000 German civilians fell victim to the air raids, "3.5 millions homes were destroyed" and, at the end of the conflict, "7.5 million people were left homeless."[12]

Besides recollecting numerical information on the degree of destruction and describing the unbearable scenarios, Sebald's work is key for us because he also describes the different types of social and psychological reactions at the time. One of them, which lasted long after the war, can be described as a sort of "collective agreement of silence": "there was a tacit agreement, equally binding on everyone, that the true state of material and moral ruin in which the country found itself was not to be described."[13]

Besides a few exceptions, nobody wanted to talk about it, neither ordinary people nor officials and public figures. According to Sebald, the fact that some "Germans faced the catastrophe that was taking place with silent fascination,"[14] was due to the fact that they were psychically already *sublimating* desperation into a volitional impulse for reconstruction. This psychological mechanism of wartime is surely important, but the most interesting one, which Sebald also mentions, is the one regarding ordinary people and how they would behave and react to the unimaginable destruction inflicted upon them.

In Hamburg, a city which was almost completely destroyed, the writer Hans Erich Nossack, "describes seeing a woman *cleaning the windows of a building* 'that stood alone and undamaged in the middle of the desert of ruins… We thought we were looking at a madwoman [the writer commented]."[15] In another case, a group of people was seen drinking coffee and listening to a gramophone on their well-tended balcony, amidst the ruins. In other words, the best way to endure the situation and carry on, was through an *acting-out* of normality.

Faced with the abrupt loss of orientation, one can either re-orient oneself in order to flee into safer places (the most common reaction at the time), or paradoxically, when this is not possible or too hard to accomplish, *bestow normality* into an abnormal situation. Cleaning windows, drinking tea, and

12 Winfried Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 3.
13 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 10.
14 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 14.
15 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 41.

so on, are actions which recall *routine* and, therefore, they automatically recall and re-evoke ordinary times. It is worth quoting at length here, Sebald's own comment:

> You do not expect an insect colony to be transfixed with grief at the destruction of a neighbouring anthill, but you do assume a certain degree of empathy in human nature, and to that extent there is indeed something alarmingly absurd and shocking about continuing to drink coffee in the normal way on Hamburg balconies at the end of July 1943. […] *On the other hand, keeping up everyday routines regardless of disaster, from the baking of a cake to put on the coffee table to the observance of more elevated cultural rituals, is a tried and trusted method of preserving what is thought of as a healthy human reason*.[16]

It may seem absurd and, indeed, not particularly wise to keep doing those everyday activities while urgent action should be paramount, but in terms of orientation, cases like these manifest *in vitro* the core dynamics involved in orienting and re-orienting ourselves.

We are oriented in a situation when we can gain an overview of it and, thanks to this overview, we can "make out promising opportunities for action in it." This is tantamount to creating a hold (*Halt*) in orientation. Maintaining a hold in orientation involves *points of reference*, *guides*, *clues*, *leads*, *indicators*, *signs*, and so on; as pointed out by Stegmaier, the German key word which synthesizes all this is *Anhaltspunkt*, translated by him as *foothold*. Although the *Anhaltspunkte* must constitutively accompany the hold of orientation, Stegmaier admits the possibility that, for a limited amount of time, orientation could rely on external clues and supports. If orientation "needs something stable and lasting, e.g. permanent objects, regulated word meanings, reliable characters, or stable institutions, then it creates them, but only as far as it needs them and only for a limited time."[17]

Going back to the examples we drew from Sebald, we can claim that, under particular circumstances, these points or clues can be also found not by a looking *outside* of orientation, but by looking *inside*. In those extreme examples, in fact, orientation relies on an *inward* movement, in which perception *preserves* itself from itself, so to speak. By drinking tea on a balcony or by cleaning windows

16 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, p. 42.
17 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 55.

in the middle of destruction, the reference points are preserved from changing. The dramatic change of situation might be so unbearable that perception, rather than acknowledging this fact, moves from being attentive to the external environment, to the inward and more familiar reality of habits/routines, people and everyday objects.

Of course, the example we are using here can be considered as an extreme case of a loss of orientation: in everyday life and in the course of one's biography, it is rare to face such radically abrupt scenarios of destruction, although with the ongoing calamities generated by anthropogenic climate change, extreme events are happening in different parts of the globe.

The activities mentioned — drinking tea and cleaning windows — are particularly interesting, because they resonate with what Stegmaier conceptualizes as the becoming-regular of orientation processes. Actions and regularities in orientation are self-structuring. This has to be taken in the double meaning of "they structure themselves" (through a seamless process of re-adjusting) and "they structure the self" (meaning the self of a person).

Stegmaier explicitly describes what happens when routines are disrupted. For example, when one experiences a crisis in his/her work life, he/she can rely on the world of his/her family. If the latter goes also through a crisis, then he/she can start to rely on the world of his/her hobby, and so on.

The multiplicity of worlds in which we orient ourselves is a resource which proves particularly useful when dealing with crises. In the case of the routinized activities in wartime this is particularly blatant. By the same token, we can see how the need for "routine" was particularly evident also during the Covid-19 lockdowns. In a lot of cases, people couldn't wait for a "return to normal." While the lockdowns were first and foremost a source of economic and social preoccupation, they were also experienced as an intolerable rupture of the rhythms and habits of daily life.

What is also important to underline is that the common denominator of the examples we drew from Sebald is that they all imply, to a greater or lesser degree, the presence of a minimal degree of *sociality*: cleaning windows, drinking tea with somebody, etc., are activities which remind us of our existence as social animals, and hence that our horizon(s) of meaning are always dependent on social recognition.

1.4 The Psychoanalytic Lesson

In the development of the categories of self-stabilization, continuity and routine, Stegmaier highlights some crucial factors which, in our view, his philosophy of orientation shares with psychoanalytical thought. One of them is that *routinization*, when successful, "is experienced with pleasure." Another, also important aspect which is underlined, is the centrality of *memory* in the processes of orientation and the stabilization thereof. The type of memory we're talking about here is neither the propositional memory about facts, nor the notional memory related to knowledge and cultural artefacts. Rather, it is "about fitting and adapting that which is remembered to the current orientation."[18]

Now, both the pleasurable nature of routinization and the selective nature of memory are key elements of psychoanalytical thought, and therefore, the structural descriptions proposed by Stegmaier have deep resonances with psychoanalytical thought.

Moreover, exactly like Stegmaier's idea that orientation is directly linked to actions, *perception*, for Freud and for Lacan, is an *active* process. In other words, the psychoanalytic account of perception is based also on a radical activity-based nature of perceptual operations, for in psychoanalysis we do not passively register *inputs* coming from the outside. Rather, our psyche and bio-neurological apparatuses actively shape what we grasp from the outside and the ways in which we do it.

In fact, the cases we just commented on of the woman cleaning windows or the people drinking tea in the midst of destruction are but special cases of the general tendency of the human psyche to *negate* or *get rid* of unpleasant realities. In cases like this, re-orientation itself helps as a means by selecting its points (*Punkte*) within the secure domain of routinized and known activities.

Psychologist Sally Weintrobe has explored which psychological dynamics are at work in the case of climate change. In her research, she individuates three main psychoanalytical dynamics: negation, disavowal and dissociation.

Denying something can take on two forms: negation and disavowal (dissociation partly differs from these). We have negation when we negativize something, in other words when we say "what is true is not true."[19] This is a

18 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, pp. 84-85.

19 Sally Weintrobe, *Psychological roots of the climate crisis: Neoliberal exceptionalism and the culture of uncare* (London: Bloomsbury University Press, 2021), p. 137.

very basic way of dealing with something we don't like and, also, one of the most common psychological reactions of non-acceptance: we simply negate a reality, despite its truth.

Disavowal, on the other hand, "says it is true, but that does not matter."[20] In other words, as Weintrobe puts it: "disavowal solves problems in 'as if' ways by bending the truth."[21] This second form of denial is more subtle than negation, because it helps the subject preventively sabotage the facing of a given reality by accepting it in a distorted way. It is, so to speak, a more sibylline dynamics, and also harder to get rid of.

In fact, it was already Freud who underlined the difference between these two mechanisms. Negation, for him, is a normal step in the process of mourning and, therefore, of accepting.[22] Negation is a way to avoid unpleasant feelings of anxiety in a situation of loss.[23] Rather than being a "delusional" defense, it is characterized as a necessary step in the process of the elaboration of the loss of an object. It is, in other words, a structural mechanism by which a lost object is re-found after its loss (echoing here, of course, the Hegelian lesson).

On the other hand, disavowal is a way of not dealing with the scabrous reality that one is facing. In the case of climate change, it is worth quoting an example by Weintrobe:

> Disavowal works by finding any way to minimize feeling disturbed by a disturbing reality. Saying climate change is a good thing as it will enable us to grow new kinds of food like pineapples in the UK overlooks all the suffering, the growing instability in the climate system and all the other adverse effects of warming such as coral bleaching in the oceans, climate refugees, and people and animals dying as a result of heat, fires, flooding and drought.[24]

While in negation the content of the negated is somehow acknowledged (and then negated), in disavowal we're more in a situation of the type: it's true but it does not matter. Finally we have dissociation, which is largely different from negation and disavowal, and that can be described as a detachment from

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20 Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots of Climate Crisis*, p. 137.
21 Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots of Climate Crisis*, p. 137.
22 Sigmund Freud, *Negation*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19 (London: Hogarth Press, 1925).
23 Sigmund Freud, *Splitting of the ego in the process of defence*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 23 (London: Hogarth Press, 1940).
24 Weintrobe, *Psychological Roots of Climate Crisis*, p. 138.

reality. There are degrees of dissociation, of course, from the most "mundane" examples to the most extreme ones.

For example, we partially dissociate when we're particularly tired or hungry but we're busy doing something important. In cases like these, we "detach" ourselves from the part of us which experiences hunger or tiredness. One way to put it is that, in those instances, we go on "auto-pilot."

As mentioned, this parallel is particularly evident when we consider that "repetition" works both at the level of actions, be they material/bodily or mental/thought actions, *and* of perception. This is because — at least in the frameworks we're referring to (i.e., Freud and Lacan) — perception, just like routinized actions and thoughts, is also in itself a type of *action*.

Put differently, the psyche is not just a passive plane in which impressions from the outside are simply registered. In the psychoanalytical frameworks of Freud and Lacan, the perceiving psyche is actively participating in constructing what is considered "real" and "out there." Dissociation through routinized actions in war situations is but a blatant example of this. And the underlying principle of cases like this is what Freud called the *pleasure principle*. The pleasure principle is intrinsically linked to repetition. In Freud's own words: "it is evident that repetition, the observation of identity, constitutes […] a source of pleasure."[25]

Of course, denial, disavowal, or other defense mechanisms do not alter the objective reality of a crisis. Moreover, the cases I brought to the fore, especially the one regarding war situations, all represent extreme examples in which re-orientation is conducted via very specific psychological means. What should be added is that these mechanisms are clearly not limited to the individual dimension. Quite on the contrary, they can be also said to be present at the scale of small groups or larger communities. One can think, for example, of similar mechanisms of "collective oblivion/forgetting" discovered and analyzed by Freud and Reik.

Still, while these mechanisms align with some key structural dynamics described in Stegmaier's account, they do not provide an answer as to how we can concretely deal with a polycritical situation, since they only describe how the first person (or group) experience of disorientation can be overcome in a short term scenario. I will articulate an answer to this issue in the final section of this paper, where I will be focusing on what I suggest are the two key

25 Sigmund Freud, *Al di là del principio di piacere* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2017 [1920]), p. 59.

features of a successful re-orientation — both individual and collective — in our current historical moment.

2. Systemic Effects and Vulnerability

2.1 Structural Features of Crises

Ongoing crises or critical happenings are qualitatively heterogeneous: we can mention climate change, ecological collapses, pandemics, wars, and so on. Instead of linearly going through every type of crisis, be it past, present or future, we will sift through different crises in order to assess and discern their structural commonalities.

First of all, one of the most important features of virtually every major crisis we're witnessing today, is that during crises not everyone is affected to the same degree. For example, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were more severe for specific groups of people than for others. The pandemic worsened the gaps and polarizations between strata of the population with more and less income. The same goes with gender differences, as the economic consequences of lockdowns affected women more than men, poor countries more than the rich ones. In cases like the United States, it also affected ethnic minorities more than the white majority.

In some cases, the impact vary also with age. For example, the pandemic worsened the housing situation of a huge number of young people. According to a study,[26] during the pandemic a significant number of people aged between 18 and 24 applied for food aid.

Moreover, within the same age bracket, one in three employee lost his/her job during the pandemic. Another crucial data is that younger people also experienced housing exclusion because, due to job loss, they couldn't afford an accommodation anymore. Therefore, a lot of them went back to living with their parents.

Unfortunately, this was a trend already unfolding before the pandemic. For example, just in Denmark between 2009 and 2018, the number of these homecomings rose by 12%. The pandemic only worsened this situation, with

26 See FEANTSA, Fondation Abbé Pierre, *Sixth overview of housing exclusion in Europe*, 2021. https:// www.feantsa.org/en/news/2021/05/05/6th-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe- 2021-youth-in-danger?bcParent=26.

more and more young people finding themselves forced to return home with their parents.

Of course, a crisis such as the pandemic impacts more those who were already somehow more vulnerable due to other previous conditions/crises. This element highlights to a second feature of crises, that of being often "chained" together with regard to their effects. Put in different terms, the effects of a crisis on the social field largely depend on pre-existing *vulnerabilities*.

Other examples of this structural principle of crises are worth mentioning. For instance, it is worth noting that during the lockdowns, the calls made by women to domestic violence hotlines skyrocketed.[27] Since they had to remain confined within the walls of their house with their partners, what was *latently* present as a potential violent behavior on the side of an unloving partner became a reality during the pandemic. When these women were asked "why don't you just leave?" the reply was almost always the same: "and where am I supposed to go?"[28]

Perhaps, if they had a concrete alternative accommodation and the financial independency to leave their violent partners, some of these women would have avoided being attacked. This, of course, is not to bypass the core issue, which is that of abusive men, but it's rather to acknowledge that every crisis (in this example the pandemic) often *interacts* with previous and preexisting "criticalities" and unstable conditions of the social field (gender gap and violence) by further catalyzing their manifestations.

In his now classic work on environmental deterioration, Rob Nixon points out exactly to the effects of happenings like pollution, which are to a large extent "too slow to be seen." In a lot of cases, pollution harms communities in such a slow and imperceptible way, that resolutions at the level of political and social orientation come too late. Moreover, there's a critical aspect that Nixon underlines, which is that of considering such slow processes of environmental deterioration as a form of slow violence, for they often imply the tacit assumption, by decision makers and by the responsible economic actors, that some portions of society are more expendable than others. Nixon defines slow violence a "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that

27 Caroline Bradbury-Jones, Louise Isham, "The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence," in *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 29 (13-14), 2020, pp. 2047-2049.
28 Leslie Kern, *La gentrificazione è inevitabile e altre bugie* (Torino: Treccani, 2022), p. 109.

is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[29]

When, say through a political deal, a petro-chemical manufacturer is allowed to dump toxic waste in an area inhabited by low income communities, thus damaging them slowly over time, we're in the presence of an instance of slow violence. As we already underlined in the previous section, the problem, in cases like these, is that a crisis is a complex object in that it is intrinsically perspectival: sometimes its existence is witnessed or coded more *locally* by embodied and perceiving actors, sometimes it is locally invisible, but instead objectively acknowledged thanks to science, for example through the use of statistical realities and statistical trends. By the same token, the type of destruction implied by the slow violence of ecological deterioration is often inscrutable because the casualties are "deferred casualties."[30] They tend to appear later.

2.2 Functional Orientation Systems and Affordances

One way to describe the relationship between ourselves and orientation systems is to borrow from James Gibson's ecological account of perception. As is well known, for Gibson, perception is not just a matter of passively receiving qualia from the outside and registering them in a supposed interior *tabula*. His approach underlines instead the centrality of *action* and *purpose* in the workings of perception itself. For example, when, no matter where we are, we perceive two surfaces placed in a way that they form a 90° angle in which the horizontal one is set not too high, we automatically see a "chair," so to speak; or, in other words, "a place to sit." In his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Gibson[31] calls these elements of our perceptual world *affordances*. These shapes and patterns are immediately given *meaning for action* in that they "afford" particular actions. In the example of the two surfaces, the action they afford is that of sitting.

Affordances are, therefore, a subset of Stegmaier's footholds (*Anhaltspunkte*), in that "footholds are chosen […] largely without an awareness of the choice

29 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge-London:Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2.
30 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 61.
31 James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2015).

being made."[32] But we can extend the Gibsonian idea of affordances further so as to include also (1) artificial or man-made objects and even (2) impersonal functional systems like the law, religion, art, etc. Seeing an elongated, small and sharp object with a tip of a color different to the rest of it, immediately activates the affordance of "writing": we don't need to re-learn what a pencil or a pen is every time we see a new one. We immediately and automatically orient ourselves because we know that *that* thing affords writing. In this, there's a feedback loop between orientation and action, for affordances for action given by surrounding objects somehow shape, in turn, orientation itself.

In other words, there's a co-determination feedback between objects/affordances and orientation. We propose to extend this logic of co-determination or, alternatively, of co-plasticity, to the realm of impersonal orientation systems. This plasticity and malleability means that, for example, in particular times one has more "choice" and more freedom when it comes to selecting how one orients him-/herself as regard to orientation systems. Under ideal or normal circumstances, I can for example decide to rely more on the political system of my own country, rather than, say, global economics. I can also decide to dedicate my time and efforts within the particular system of art, rather than, say, media.

By the same token, under ordinary circumstances, I can "sacrifice" — so to speak — my knowledge of everyday facts as they are provided by media, for example regarding world facts, and be focused exclusively on the system of religion, by acknowledging the only authority of my local priest and the church he represents.

But since the dialectics between freely orienting oneself between different systems and the cogency or necessitation of particular orientation systems is subjected to historical conditions, the degrees of freedom are also altered by this very same contingency. For example, under non-ordinary or exceptional circumstances, some orientation systems are simply non-pertinent and therefore put in "stand-by." This is particularly clear during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In the totality of countries worldwide, the range of active functional systems had to shrink due to the preponderant importance of public health and logistics. For example, the art sector was particularly affected and, for a while, artistic activities had to be put in standby mode. Religious events as well, such

32 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 59.

as going to church, were subjected to the same constraints, as gatherings of any sort could represent potential catalysts for further contagions.

Moreover, some other systems had to re-adapt or shrink, rather than being completely (although momentarily) shut down. This was the case, for example, of economics and industrial production in general. In particular, in some cases, specific types of manufacturers had to temporarily modify or augment their output as to meet the new material needs. Manufacturers of FFP2 masks had to double or triple their production, as well as manufacturers of disinfectants and so on. In some cases, manufacturers in other non-related types of production actively helped by temporarily "reconverting" production itself. For example, some Italian fashion brands started to produce masks to help with the sudden increased demand. The same goes with places and facilities. Some public areas like parks, schools, and so on, were re-functionalized as hubs for Covid-19 tests and, later on, as vaccination hubs.

2.3 Large-Scale Orientation between Order and Disorder

Previously, by drawing on Stegmaier's idea of functional orientation systems, we claimed that, all in all, these systems serve the purpose of letting us "outsource" a part of the burden of our orientation. After all, we don't go hunting every day or grow our own plants when we need food. We rely on shops, markets and sellers of such type of goods. In other words, the outsourcing effect of these systems is tantamount to a *simplification* of life and hence of orientation itself.

The concept deployed by Stegmaier regarding this general feature is that of *abbreviation*. All orientation systems, also in the case of macroscopic ones like politics, allow for abbreviations which economize our orientation, saving us time, effort and the use of resources. In this regard, economics is, for Stegmaier, the paradigmatic example of the operation of abbreviation and, besides its meaning as a specific discipline or field of study, it is also an essential feature of orientation: "Economics in this wider sense is a basic requirement of orientation: the *abbreviation of orientation of everything that is cumbersome, superfluous, and inexpedient.*"[33]Abbreviation means the reduction of the uncertainty in new situations. One example is when we learn a new complex activity or hobby like chess. In studying the theory of chess, one usually reads about how to recognize

33 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, pp. 158-159.

recurring *patterns*, that is, particular configurations of pieces that arise often. If one studies these patterns, and hence learns how to navigate the chessboard every time a specific pattern emerges, one becomes not only *more* successful, but also *faster* in dealing with similar situations in different matches. Learning these patterns means that through the acquisition of an external body of knowledge, one is able to play more "automatically," so to speak.

Moving on from this example to the larger picture, we can also claim that society or civilization is the attempt to *abbreviate* paths and actions. Abbreviations imply the reduction of disorder and the giving of order. Society as a whole is a set of dispositives and systems which reduce chaos and disorder. It does so by employing both material and immaterial abbreviations. For example, ethical codes, books of etiquette, civil codes, and so on, in *proscribing* forbidden conducts, also automatically suggest the right paths of action, they simplify choice for us.

In the materialist philosophical approach of Levi Bryant, things like handbooks, registers and official documents, moral prescriptions, laws, etc., are all *semiotic machines*[34] which work exactly by reducing doubt and by assuring order and efficacy.

2.4 Procedural Democracy and Political Orientation in the Time of Catastrophes

The more complex societies become, the more their hierarchies become articulated and the more *energy* is needed to sustain and maintain the societal structure. In the jargon of economics, we can say that a society's *energy intake* is correlated to its *power*. In fact, all the activities that help a society sustain itself (and defend itself against the outside and against internal resistance) consume a significant amount of energy. These activities imply, among others, "standing armies, organized religion, education and conditioning, a legal system, various bureaucracies" and so on.[35]

As one might expect, within a given society, its accretion means also new paths and possibilities for orientation for its members. As opportunities and diversity grow, it grows also the need for new professional figures, new

34 Levi Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Durham/London: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

35 Shimshon Bichler, Jonathan Nitzan, "Growing Through Sabotage. Energizing Hierarchical Power," in *Review of Capital as Power*, 1(5), 2020, p. 37.

specific types of occupation, and so on. This structural feature of society can be synthesized in the principle that "hierarchical power is a *means* of harnessing more energy."[36] As noted by Fix, Bichler and Nitzan, "societies that wish to increase their standard of living can do so only by accepting more hierarchical power structures. Without such vertical structures, they would be unable to coordinate on a scale large enough to harness the energy they need."[37]

However, as we underlined in the previous paragraph, this process comes at a price, namely the price of a general systemic exhaustion in the form of environmental destruction and diminished availability of energy and resources. In other words, we can say that this loop between complexification and energy intake has reached a "ceiling," so to speak, after which the potential damage and the perils are more relevant than the gains.

In fact, we're already witnessing the effects of this intrinsic limit. For example, global warming has already caused longer and more intense heatwaves, as well as new extreme events like storms, drought, floods, etc. In Europe, only in 2003, such events caused the death of 70.000 people and agricultural loss of 13 billion euros.[38]

An important aspect to underline here is that the multiple crises which we are facing today are related to each other. For example, it is now widely known that the risk of coming into contact with new pathogens like viruses is strictly connected to things like deforestation and the destruction of natural environments due to human activities. The more we exploit and consume exotic parts of the world, the more we come into contact with animals which may potentially carry dangerous viruses. This is, put in other terms, a case of a disturbance or interaction between the spheres of globalization/economy and health.

In "normal times," the way our societies deal with systemic problems is through politics. Just like our own incarnated orientations, politics is about orientation but on a much larger scale. It is important to emphasize that in defining what politics is about, Stegmaier includes the dimensions of uncertainity and crisis:

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36 Blair Fix / Shimshon Bichler / Jonathan Nitzan, "Ecological limits and hierarchical power," in *Real-World Economics Review Blog*, 2019. http://www.socialisteconomist.com/2019/04/ecological-limits-and-hierarchical-power.html.

37 Fix, Bichler, Nitzan, "Ecological limits and hierarchical power."

38 Pablo Servigne, Raphaël Stevens, *Convivere con la catastrofe. Piccolo manuale di collassologia* (Roma:Treccani, 2021), p. 60.

> [the basic requirement of politics] is the general capability of adapting to rapidly changing situations and of frequently making quick decisions under an oftentimes extreme pressure of time. That such decisions are, in the light of global interdependencies, in times of crisis, and particularly under the threats of terror and war, largely decisions made under the condition of uncertainty makes politics an extremely demanding orientation practice.[39]

As it is underlined in this passage, criticality, uncertainty and, moreover, "global interdependency," are not exceptional characteristics of political orientation, but rather its quintessential ingredients. Politics *is* about dealing with such realities. In order to fulfil its goals, the political systems has to differentiate into different and specific domains (foreign policy, national defense, economics, education, etc.). In recent years, in fact, some governments had to internally modify the aims of specific departments so as to include the new necessities arisen due to our present crises. For example, in his book on *World Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck mentions how, in 2006, the English minister of foreign affairs Beckett re-categorized climate change and resource depletion as a problem of *foreign policy*.[40] The reasoning behind this was that, since wars for limited material resources have always existed, and since, due to climate change, some resources will be less and less available, potential scarcity problems arising in the future will have to be considered as having to do with international conflicts. We can, of course, ask ourselves if this internal re-organization of political systems is enough to meet the pressing issue of climate change, and also if it is in general the right strategy. In any case, it is a clear example of how politics modifies itself internally in order to meet new types of problems and uncertainty.

On another level, when it comes to politics as an instrument of orientation, we are also dealing with a specific type of *abbreviation*, which comes in the form of democracy. Democracy, in turn, works via the principle of majority: in order to take decisions, we rely on voting and its outcome. There's also a deep connection between, on the one hand, complexification/growth of society and, on the other, the process of democratization. In fact, for Stegmaier, "majority decisions bring about further crucial abbreviations of the political orientation."[41]

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39 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 167.
40 Ulrich Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 15.
41 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 169.

However, Stegmaier also underlines that another higher order of things is involved here, namely the fact that, beside voting, politics also implies a particular *framing* of the situation. This means that prior to the voting process (already in itself an abbreviation), there's an abbreviation in the form of *which* problems *are to be considered*, what are the *priorities* and, also, the set of *alternatives* to solve them. In other words, while the democratic majority decision can be called a *choice*, the way in which politics (pre)selects *which* problems are to be faced is a *meta-choice*. In these meta-choices, the degree of choice on the side of the population is clearly lower than in the direct process of voting. Put in simpler terms, while through the voting process we decide between one thing or another, we remain less free in deciding *how* the alternatives and the problems themselves are selected in the first place. Therefore, we can claim that the majority decision has to be considered an abbreviation of an abbreviation: the first abbreviation in chronological and structural order is the one regarding which problems are prioritized and how they are framed. Democracy and its instruments (i.e., voting) are part of the "flow" in the activity of solving problems and finding solutions to contemporary problems. In other words, in democracy, society doesn't "freeze" when facing problems or anomalies because we take democratic dispositives to be acquired and reliable procedures. Put in conceptual terms, these dispositives function as settled abbreviations.

2.5 Limits of Democracy: Can We Automate Orientation?

Theoretical doubts about the faith in democratic procedures appear from time to time in the history of ideas, in philosophy as well as in political theory. What's important to underline in the present context of multiple crises, is the fact that, through the historical processes that led to the automation of these procedures, a key component of our general societal orientation was *lost*. In other words, the automation of orientation came, perhaps, at a price which is becoming apparent only today in the age of multiple crises. The element lost in the process of the automation of democracy is the possibility of thinking the *moral* and *broader picture* of what comes *prior* to the procedures themselves. In order to clarify this point, we will align here to Max Horkheimer's critique of *subjective reason*, thus borrowing from his arguments.

According to the philosopher of the Frankfurt School, *reason* itself underwent an epochal transformation in which, from *objective*, it became

subjective. According to Horkheimer, we're in cases of *objective* reason when a given system of thought encompasses the whole of reality: in other words, when reason considers itself true because it acknowledges the fact that humans (society), the world (nature), concrete objects and spiritual/mental ones, are all part of a single and bigger objective reality. According to Horkheimer, the crisis undergone by reason in modern times has to do with the fact that, at a certain point in history, thought became incapable of conceiving such an objectivity, and hence started to negate it claiming that it was an illusion.[42]

The argument goes synthetically as follows: since in modern times we don't believe anymore in the "bigger picture" and, moreover, we relegate it in the realm of illusions or myths, reason transformed itself from objective to subjective. With "subjective" Horkheimer doesn't mean "relative to the individual," hence claiming some sort of subjective relativism. Rather, he means that, instead of having to explain the broader picture (the world, ethics, etc.), reason became simply a *procedural* ability that each human being possesses. The only criterion of this subjective reason is its *instrumental value*.[43] Therefore, within the scopes of subjective reason, we have learned not to waste time with the exploration of all the qualities of a being or object, let alone the more fundamental relations between us and the world. What's useful is to economize reason, to make it a reliable instrument of our calculations. The validity of ideals, principles of ethics, the criteria for our actions and our fundamental decisions, become all secondary: they are a matter of subjective taste, not of reason.

The key point made by Horkheimer is particularly relevant for us because it helps us understand the limit of this type of subjective/procedural reason in the context of our age of catastrophes. Indeed, such arguments resurface in Jean-Pierre Dupuy's theory of catastrophes, which emphasizes the same type of problems in the context of procedural democracy. The problem of reducing democracy to procedural democracy is that, by leaving any possible substantial or normative reflection outside its scope, it can never question the overall objective arrangements of society, thus reinforcing a vicious circle of non-reflexivity and short-sightedness: "Saying that rationality is procedural, is saying that once there's agreement on the right and good procedures, that which is produced by them will be *ipso facto*, for a sort of inherited property,

42 Max Horkheimer, *Eclisse della ragione. Critica della ragione strumentale* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), p. 14.
43 Horkheimer, *Eclisse della ragione*, p. 25.

right and good."[44] Procedural rationality is of course synonymous here with what Horkheimer calls *subjective reason*.

Because of this shortsighted loop, Dupuy doubts that the new ways in which we are harming our earth and the problems that arise from this can be addressed through the usual democratic procedures. This is patently clear when it comes to collectively decide if something belonging to the realm of industry is good or not for public health, like in the case of the decision over the construction of a chemical facility or an oil refinery. In cases like this, Dupuy notes, *the absence of the proof is not the proof of the absence. Not* knowing if the chemical facility or the oil refinery are harmful for our health doesn't imply that they are *not*. However, in procedural democracies everything is about time, and if the procedures for deciding on such matters are respected, then long-term doubts are bypassed *until proved otherwise.* In other words, the problem with democratic proceduralism is that, according to Dupuy, it is almost completely blind to the idea of the long-term consequences of our actions (or non-actions). This type of procedural reason deals mostly with what is *seen*. However, as we underlined at the beginning of this section, things like ecological deterioration, spillovers, resources depletion, and so on, often happen *out of sight* and their effects are *deferred* in time. In Stegmaier's terms, this means that, at least in the case of slow crises (environment, climate, etc.), we cannot rely forever on a moral of immediacy, that is, a morality based on the category of emergency.

3. Towards Co-Orientation

3.1 Orienting through Others' Orientation

We're living in an epoch characterized by the unique feature of being globally interconnected. This *interconnectedness* has at least two meanings. Firstly, it means that "our global orientation world has been increasingly 'globalized'" because, thanks to various means and instruments (like communication technologies, satellites, etc.), we can have an almost immediate awareness of everything happening on the surface of our planet. To put it in Stegmaier's own words: "The geographical overview of the world is thus (almost) complete."[45] It is not only a matter of "geographical" overview, for this interconnectedness

44 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé. Quand l'impossible est certain* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 21.
45 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 247.

is also about the speed at which information and decisions can travel from one place to the other. The second meaning of this *interconnectedness* has to do, instead, with the fact that *causal* links and chains are now able to propagate through incredibly long distances. As Stegmaier points out: "In our spatially and temporally globalized world, a world society develops in which everyone may deal with everyone else at any time or place on earth."[46]

Both these meanings or aspects of the interconnectedness of the world have to do with the economy: (1) the speed of communication makes it possible for money/capital to travel and move at instant speed, as well as information; (2) the perils of pandemics, for example, are highly exacerbated by the *material* interconnectedness enabled by the transportation of commodities and people alike. Stegmaier highlights how one of the key material preconditions of such a globalized reality were the material possibilities enabled by the organization and coordination, through time, of a world market.

This interconnectedness can be said to be the immanent realization of what Leibniz describes, in his *Monadology*, as a relational plenitude in which "everything is connected because of the fullness of the world." According to this deeply interconnectionist view, "every body acts upon all the others and is, in turn, subjected to their reactions, in a major or lesser extent depending on the distance." [47] Today, unfortunately, we experience more and more the reality of a causally interconnected world in the form of destructive or dangerous phenomena unfolding spatially and affecting areas and communities at a distance. This idea of global catastrophes whose center of origin generates a "diffraction" of effects seriously pushes us into rethinking our own orientation and actions. To borrow from Stegmaier's own words, "threats of war and terror, climate change, the destruction of biodiversity, and other dangers to the living conditions on earth - all these make common political world orientations necessary."[48] Since every local decision may radically influence other actors or regions of the world, causing potential damage and imbalances, it should become of primary importance that every local or singular orientation took into consideration this very interconnectedness. To a certain extent, it can be said that this rethinking itself is *embedded*, so to speak, into the globalized reality itself as if the latter was one of its preconditions (in principle, at least). Indeed,

46 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 248.
47 Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadologia* (Milano: Bompiani, 2017), p. 39.
48 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 249.

as underlined by Stegmaier, "as far as the economic competitive pressure of globalization contributes to the endangerment of so far untouched nature, of the climatic living conditions of humanity, and of cultural goods and diversity, the political globalization may coerce governments to take coordinated worldwide counter measures."[49]

However, as we've seen in the previous section, the normal democratic orders and institutional set-ups with which we automatically orient ourselves, are subject to "vicious" mechanisms which impede any actual change in this direction. The supposed smooth *automaticity* of our political orientations is perhaps not well equipped against the potential influence by egotistic or profit-driven interests. Moreover, even if we are able to take control of the processes at hand, thus preventing as much as possible their resurfacing and their future damages, we still have to find an answer to the question regarding our own everyday orientation as members of groups, communities, nations, and so on.

This is not a need that should be overlooked. We've become almost accustomed to being daily bombarded with statistics regarding "how many deaths" were caused by this or that calamity, "how high was the temperature" in this or that side of the world, and so on. Being bombarded every day with such "bulletins of destruction" should in no way lead us to a form of "cynical reason"[50] in which we become desensitized to these events altogether.

Our tentative answer to the problem of (dis)orientation in the age of multiple crises relies on the concept of *co-orientation*. The prefix "co-" stands here at the same time for "cooperative" and "common": co-orientation means *cooperatively* orientating ourselves and orienting ourselves towards what is *common* between us. We draw this concept from a couple of important passages in which Stegmaier, although he doesn't use this same phrasing, seems to suggest a similar conceptual possibility. In particular, we are referring to his reflections on science, scientific orientation and scientific activity.

First of all, it must be said that scientific orientation is not simply isomorphic to ordinary/everyday orientation. In the realm of science, "something can become an object […] only to the degree to which it can be made transparent,"[51] whereas in everyday orientation such a requirement is not necessary. In the case of everyday orientation, we deal with changing situations and with a certain

49 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 250.
50 Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).
51 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 184.

degree of unpredictability. Therefore, we navigate our daily situations on the basis of *plausibility*, as Stegmaier himself points out. Moreover, the degree of formalization upon which scientists agree is not necessary in the case of mundane orientation: the logic of ordinary orientation can be said to be "fuzzier" than the scientific one.

However, despite these deep differences, there are some key aspects of scientific orientation that are worth "transferring" to a general orientation in the age of multiple crises. We're referring here in particular to the fact that, once the methods, objects and problems are set, the scientific community acts as a dispersed — that is, both local and global — system of orientation which self-adjusts itself continuously. The inter-communication between scientists, facilitated by today's communication technologies, allows their coordination and mutual recognition. Their efforts give rise to an emergent process of knowledge which is widely spread through time and space. There is a passage from Stegmaier which is worth quoting in its entirety:

> In their respective areas of research, they [the scientists] publish their contributions, and other researchers working in the same field examine these results based on their own expertise. This is, truly (i.e. true within the frame of the philosophy of orientation), an *ideal model for orientations orienting themselves to other orientations: the ideal according to which all people involved continually and deliberately consider and engage with all factual contributions, produce with great discipline, in order to arrive at a common orientation*.[52]

Here, the two key parts that we want to underline are the expressions "orientations orienting themselves to other orientations" and "common orientation." The scientific orientation is a peculiar case of orientation in which the *singular* orientation is sustained through its connection to the collective orientation of the community, a peculiarity also emphasized by Thomas Kuhn.[53] Put in other words, it is a case in which one bases his/her own orientation by taking as points of reference the orientations of others. Hence, even in the case of scientific orientation we see the always present "situativity" of orientation.[54] Orienting through others' orientations means that the *whole* of orientation works

52 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 193.
53 See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Brad Wray, *Kuhn's Evolutionary Social Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
54 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 190.

as a metastable (but always revisable) system which is held together by its own results and by the dialogue these results weave thanks to it functioning. But there's more to this, since the contributions generated by this type of orientation aim at producing a *common orientation*: in other words, the goal of scientific orientation is itself an orientation. Put together, these two elements of scientific orientation constitute what we call co-orientation.

Furthermore, co-orientation could also work as a *psychological* antidote to individual disorientation. This is because we perceive less the paralyzing effects of disorientation when we can share the *feelings* of disorientation with others, as we saw in the first part of our paper. In other words, the possibility of facing disorientation socially (and not individually) is a key component in the prevention against a potential derailment towards despair. In turn, not being paralyzed in *in*action is, according to us, already one big part of the solution to collective and individual disorientation.

3.2 The Systemic/Quantitative Aspect of Collective Orientation

The element of co-orientation is only one ingredient of what I suggest as the possible solution for a renewed orientation in the time of multiple crises. The other one, which I will be briefly describe, has to do with some objective and systemic features of our actual societies.

First of all, I wanted to stress the role of scientific orientation for the specific reason that it seems to be the only case in which orientation is based on the existence of mutual orientations based on rigorous controls. I'm of course leaving out the problem of malignant scientists with other interests (which may alter results), or the problem of the influence of political bodies and politicians on the results, or their attempts to alter or ignore them. Still, in itself the scientific practice seems to be exceptionally apt at producing orientations that last. If a paper came out today claiming something about a specific biological process, and it turned out to make false claim, its chance of surviving and solidifying into mainstream knowledge would be almost zero, since the community itself would immediately notice its flaws and mistakes. Of course, the environment of scientific experiments and theories seems more isolated than others, and their results are often not attended with the same degree of urgency as, say, a political decision regarding a pandemic, an event requiring speed and efficiency.

The other key feature of the scientific modes of orientations is that, unlike their political or economic (global) counterparts, they are about smaller communities, namely the *scientific community*. The complexity and chaotic nature of our societies has created instead the effect of a progressive relativization of possible orientations in the form of equally viable "positions" which one can chose from.[55]

For this reason, the other key feature that I want to add to co-orientation for a time of multiple crises is that of *downscaling*. Orientation works when certain size thresholds are respected, as it is for smaller local communities or specific communities dealing with particular objectives.

For this reason, I would like to stress the nexus between the quantitative and systemic aspect of our global and heavily interconnected society, and the difficulty of re-gaining firmer ways of orientation when chaos and divergencies reign. After all, most — if not all — of the current parts of today's polycrisis are all heavily facilitated by the explosion of nexuses and chaotic behaviors of large scale societies and economies. The vicious circle unfolding is such that the more we want to come terms with these systemic shocks through a "global" reorientation, the more we keep ourselves stuck in the same loops which reproduce them. For this reason, I would like to conclude this paper by suggesting that orientation in itself may be heavily and structurally dependent on issues of scale and size, and that to secure the ever-ongoing possibility to endure a crisis and re-orient ourselves may be also dependent on the shape we give to our own social environment. Thus, this other (second) element of orientation will have to deal with such type of problems and act in the direction of simplifying and "de-growing" the size and impact of our own society.

55 A similar remark can be found in Werner Stegmaier, *Orientation in Philosophy: Courageous Beginnings in the History of Philosophy toward a Philosophy of Orientation*, Augmented Edition (Nashville: Orientation Press, 2024), p. 275.

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V.

Trust in the Rationality of Ongoing Processes and Increased Use of Nuclear Energy

by Tomáš Korda, Czech Republic

Abstract: This article adopts a Hegelian framework to explore the crises facing humanity today. These crises, characterized by their escalating severity and simultaneous occurrence, urge us to step back from ideological biases, suspend subjective assumptions, and instead recognize the objective rationality inherent in the crises themselves. To support this perspective, the article examines the intersection of environmental and international crises, emphasizing the need for harmonized policies that effectively address both. Such policies must go beyond achieving carbon neutrality; they must also reinforce national sovereignty, self-reliance, and independence. This requires the gradual phasing out of both fossil fuels—which, while enabling relative self-sufficiency, contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions—and renewables, which compromise sovereignty by being dependent on immediate natural conditions (e.g., weather) and lacking adequate long-term energy storage solutions. The article concludes that it is not subjective intellect (*Verstand*) but the objective rationality of these crises that compels a renaissance in nuclear energy.

"One must not cheat anyone, not even the world of its victory."[1]

1. Learning from Denial: Understanding and Navigating Crisis Response

"How can one orient oneself amidst multiple crises?" This question lies at the heart of my essay. The conventional answer acknowledges an apparent truth: "Only with immense struggle can one find direction in such turbulent times." This response resonates with common sense. As crises multiply, their concurrent manifestation compounds the complexity of our situation, making reorientation increasingly challenging. Under these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that many retreat into denial—questioning, minimizing, or outright rejecting the crises at hand.

Denialism emerges as a psychological defense mechanism when the mind confronts the simultaneity, urgency, and gravity of challenges, often intensified by dramatic media coverage. Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* illuminates this phenomenon, particularly through his concept of "implicatory denial." In this form of denial, individuals accept the facts but minimize their implications to protect themselves from moral or emotional distress. Such denial, while seemingly irrational, serves as an understandable shield against cognitive overwhelm.[2]

This empathetic view of denialism as a survival mechanism should moderate our impulse to moralize or condemn it outright. Dismissing it as mere irresponsibility fails to acknowledge the human need for psychological equilibrium when confronting seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Yet, as reflective beings capable of transcending our immediate perceptions, we must also recognize denialism's inherent dangers. While it may provide temporary relief, ignoring genuine crises creates conditions for catastrophic outcomes. When the stakes are real, disavowal transforms from an individual coping strategy into a collective threat.

In this context, adherence to pragmatic common sense becomes counterproductive if it engenders helplessness in the face of mounting complexity. The path beyond crisis demands a reorientation that challenges conventional

1 Franz Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms of Franz Kafka*. Translated by M. Hofmann (New York: Schocken Books, 2006), p. 53.
2 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press 2001).

wisdom. Consider this provocative possibility: the more crises humanity confronts, the easier it may become to navigate them. This counterintuitive perspective forms the central thesis of my argument.

2. Addressing Multiple Crises Simultaneously

The Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and the ensuing war for independence has thrust international relations into an officially recognized crisis. The gravity of this geopolitical situation rivals the escalating urgency of climate change. As time progresses, determining which issue demands more immediate attention becomes increasingly challenging. Rather than addressing these crises sequentially, both must be tackled simultaneously.

However, even parallel actions targeting both issues may fail to yield the desired outcomes. Addressing two problems separately yet concurrently differs fundamentally from pursuing a single course of action that advances multiple objectives simultaneously. This essay argues that the multiplicity of today's crises demands a strategic approach that addresses several challenges through unified action—effectively "killing two birds with one stone."

Without developing this capacity, addressing one crisis risks exacerbating another. For instance, measures deemed effective for combating climate change might conflict with geopolitical realities. Even when one solution does not directly undermine another, the results may still fall short. As Werner Stegmaier aptly notes, "it is not about just doing anything, but about doing what is 'right' in a given situation, i.e., what promises to be successful or by means of which the 'most can be made of a situation.'"[3]

From an effectiveness standpoint, a paradox emerges. Wealthier nations, equipped with the technology and resources needed to address multiple crises, often choose to tackle them separately. This fragmented approach reflects an underlying desire to "have their cake and eat it too"—to avoid confronting the reality of overlapping crises as a singular, interconnected challenge. Instead of recognizing these crises' urgency as part of an integrated whole, there is a tendency to treat each as a discrete issue, undermining the potential for comprehensive and lasting solutions.

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3 Werner Stegmaier, *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation*, transl. Reinhard G. Mueller (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), p. 25.

Consequently, it is often only when their resources are depleted, or their strategies reach a breaking point, that these nations reassess their approach. Only in moments of anxiety, despair, or a sense of being "completely lost" do they embrace the need for a fresh perspective. As Stegmaier observes, orientation "only becomes noticeable when it no longer works," and "the need for orientation only arises when orientation fails." This essay seeks to illuminate the process of reorientation—specifically, "the achievement of finding [a] way in a situation to make out opportunities for actions to master the situation."[4]

According to Werner Stegmaier, "in situations of orientation, time is experienced as time shortage and time pressure."[5] Similarly, Henry Kissinger argues that a true politician must possess the ability to act even when lacking all the necessary information to make the "right" decision. Since time cannot be rewound, decisions cannot be postponed until a perfect understanding, grounded in complete scientific knowledge, is achieved.[6]

The constraints imposed by time underscore the finitude of human existence. This fundamental aspect of the human condition limits the range of possible actions and becomes especially palpable during crises. Under such pressure, individuals cannot afford to approach situations with complacency or arbitrariness. Kissinger aptly notes: "Decisions can be avoided until a crisis brooks no further delay, until the events themselves have removed the element of ambiguity. But at that point, the scope for constructive action is at the minimum."[7] When opportunities for meaningful or even arbitrary action dwindle, individuals must adapt to the situation at hand and rely on its inherent rationality to navigate it.

3. In the World We Trust

To grasp the counterintuitive notion that an abundance of crises simplifies navigation, we must first cultivate trust in the world's inherent rationality. As Kafka astutely observes, "in the fight between you and the world, back the world."[8] The more our world becomes enmeshed in crises, the more it demands our allegiance. This trust in the world's rational structure becomes an essential

4 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?,* pp. 5-6.
5 Ibid, p. 31.
6 Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), pp. 21-26.
7 Ibid, p. 18.
8 Franz Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms of Franz Kafka*, p. *52*.

anchor when purely subjective measures falter and crises exceed the boundaries of personal reasoning.

However, we must not mistake this trust in objectivity for naive realism—the belief that reality becomes immediately accessible once we shed our subjective or ideological biases. On the contrary, the very assumption of an untainted reality lurking behind ideological distortions is itself an ideological construct. Developing a critical distance from the world thus becomes essential. Reality's essence may diverge from its appearances, and maintaining a genuine suspicion toward this possibility serves as our necessary starting point.

Yet suspicion cannot be our final destination. Crises challenge our ability to maintain a detached, critical stance toward reality. To engage meaningfully with a crisis, we must transcend our initial suspicion that things may not be as they appear. Consider the simple act of writing on paper: to use it effectively, we must move beyond seeing it as merely something that *resembles* paper to accepting it for what it is. This transformation illustrates why "meaning arises in the situation itself; it is not given and fixed in advance."[9] Meaning emerges when we affirm that what appears to be something is precisely that thing—this affirmation bridges the gap between knowledge and action.

The journey from suspicion to objectivity culminates in what we might term "reflected trust." While critical discourse serves an invaluable function, it must ultimately be transcended, as it inherently maintains a negative stance toward its object.[10] Trust in the world becomes reflective when persistent questioning, doubt, and problematization are absorbed and superseded. Intellectual trust in the world involves leaning on it without fear of collapse. Trust in objectivity acknowledges that no situation is so incomprehensible that it cannot be navigated, nor so opaque that it lacks discernible boundaries. Like an optical illusion, complexity can be unraveled through patient observation.

Those who trust the world and its situations maintain optimism about their capacity to reorient themselves and act effectively. Observers who trust watch situations unfold, confident that patience will reveal the way forward. This deliberate non-intervention, rooted in careful observation, transforms earlier critical suspicion into a valuable resource.

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9 Stegmaier, *What is Orientation?*, p. 36.

10 Robert Koch, "The Critical Gesture in Philosophy," in: *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (MIT Press, 2002), pp. 524–536, here p. 531.

This observational approach assumes that situations will eventually reveal objective markers—landmarks and signposts—that aid orientation. It mirrors the pragmatic belief that "the context of events produces a solution."[11] Here, complexity ceases to be an obstacle and becomes a fundamental component of the solution itself. Rather than projecting rationality behind appearances, our task is to recognize rationality as the very fabric of the situation. To borrow Hegel's metaphor, rationality becomes the "rose on the cross of the present"[12] — not imposed from outside but arising from within, enabling us to discern the logic of crises and act with purpose.

4. Putting the Environmental Crisis in the Context of the International Crisis

To discern rationality amid our current international and environmental crises, we must view the latter through the lens of the former. The crises of interstate relations offer crucial guidance on how to address the ecological crisis effectively.

When we isolate the ecological crisis from the context of international relations, our survival strategy becomes dangerously ambiguous. Facing instability—whether environmental or geopolitical—naturally triggers a drive for self-preservation. However, ambiguity emerges from conflicting survival strategies: should we focus on enduring an increasingly inhospitable environment, or on preserving the environment itself as a means of self-protection? Both strategies carry merit, leaving actors caught in strategic paralysis.

The international crisis provides a critical framework for resolving these dilemmas. Unlike nature, often romanticized as a stable and unyielding foundation for life, international relations exist solely through the interactions of sovereign states. These relations lack nature's autonomous permanence and are inherently fragile—each state's actions having immediate and significant repercussions on its relations with others. No state can afford to depend on enduring friendships between nations or take peace for granted. The unpredictability of future intentions further complicates matters, as states cannot fully ascertain one another's motives.[13] Trust between nations is painstakingly built through

11 Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy*, p. 29.
12 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 22.
13 Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay." in: *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 187–212.

mutual effort but remains vulnerable, as international treaties can be unilaterally revoked. Moreover, trust can collapse due to entirely subjective, often unfounded suspicions. When one state grows distrustful of another's intentions, mutual confidence erodes, leaving relationships precariously balanced.

This inherent fragility serves as a restraint against reckless action. States cannot afford to overlook the fundamental uncertainty and instability in their interactions. The deepening international crisis reawakens latent insecurities, which appear less as constructs imposed by states and more as objective features of the system itself. Consequently, nations are compelled to focus on survival strategies suited to a hostile environment rather than pursuing the arguably futile goal of rescuing an ecosystem already at a critical tipping point.

Only the first strategy fully acknowledges that the crisis in international relations has already materialized. Recognizing the crisis as "absolutely present" ensures the second approach cannot take precedence. Attempts to "rescue" international relations overlook a fundamental reality: the crisis has already arrived. Once a crisis manifests, it is inherently too late to salvage what it has already imperiled. The second approach—focused on crisis prevention or environmental preservation—appears reasonable but holds validity only before the crisis unfolds. To prevent what is already occurring is inherently contradictory, akin to trying to save what is already in freefall. As Nietzsche provocatively asserts, "O my brothers, am I cruel? But I say: what is falling, we should still push!"[14]

In light of what John Mearsheimer aptly termed the "tragedy of great power politics,"[15] consider the implications when we contextualize the environmental crisis within the fragile dynamics of interstate relations. What insights emerge when fragile and adversarial interstate relations are superimposed on the natural environment? What does the natural environment reveal when viewed through the lens of fragile and tragic interstate relations? The result might well be called the tragedy of environmental politics.

From this perspective, the priority must shift to ensuring survival in an increasingly hostile environment rather than pursuing mediated or indirect strategies to save it. Addressing the ecological emergency demands an approach

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, transl. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978 [1954]), p. 209.
15 John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

analogous to the logic of immediate self-preservation: the objective is not to save the planet first but to survive even as conditions grow less hospitable.

Efforts to save the planet, as often emphasized, require extensive cooperation and coordinated action among major powers. However, the tragic dynamics of international relations cast serious doubt on the feasibility of such large-scale collaboration. Countries struggle to trust one another on environmental policies while simultaneously harboring deep distrust in the realm of security. Geopolitical rivals are unlikely to fully cooperate on ecological initiatives, as states—like individuals—frequently suspect that others may exploit their goodwill for strategic advantage. Suspicion, a defining feature of international interactions, undermines even the most well-intentioned collaborative efforts.

When a nation pursues two contradictory strategies, its policies may appear ecologically responsible while simultaneously being geopolitically imprudent. This tension creates a paradoxical situation: environmentalists may commend the nation for its progress, while foreign policy strategists raise concerns about national security risks. Efforts to mitigate long-term environmental degradation might, in the short term, weaken the nation's defenses and resilience against external threats. Germany's energy policy exemplifies this discord, highlighting the conflict between ecological aspirations and geopolitical necessities.

Addressing this apparent schizophrenia is crucial to resolving the ecological crisis. Environmentally conscious policies must strengthen a country's critical infrastructure and public institutions, enhancing their ability to withstand both natural disasters and foreign interference. When green policies align with national security interests, governments are more likely to embrace them. Conversely, any environmental initiative that jeopardizes a nation's security can be easily dismissed or weakened by invoking the need to avoid a crisis similar to the one Germany faced in February 2022.

5. Fukuyama versus Nuclear Power

As the imperative to reconcile environmental policy with national security intensifies, nuclear power emerges in a renewed and strategic light. As an essentially carbon-free and resilient energy source, it addresses both environmental and security concerns simultaneously. However, its resurgence can be impeded

by ideological perspectives, particularly when nations interpret themselves through the lens of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.[16]

Fukuyama's vision of universal human history commands attention through its teleological framing. In this view, Western democracies—characterized by citizens' rights, the rule of law, and checks on power—represent not merely the culmination of human history but a model for all others to emulate. Non-Western nations, within this framework, are perceived not as challengers but as followers inevitably moving toward Western ideals along this historical trajectory.

Within such a framework, international relations shed their character as arenas of security dilemmas. Economic interdependence with authoritarian regimes is not viewed as a risk but as a mechanism accelerating their transformation into liberal democracies. If these nations are "like us in essence," their convergence becomes merely a matter of time. Interdependence, far from being dangerous, becomes a catalyst for this process.

When we begin to question this "essentialism"—probing the intentions of non-Western nations and considering whether they might exploit economic interdependence—the suppressed uncertainty resurfaces. This suspicion undermines Fukuyama's teleological view of history. Amid sudden and drastic changes in the international environment, the overlooked advantages of nuclear power—especially its capacity to bolster a nation's resilience, independence, self-reliance, and sovereignty—regain their prominence.:

Moreover, in today's geopolitically fraught environment, conventional concerns about nuclear energy—such as operational safety and construction costs—appear increasingly exaggerated. These fears seem anchored to a bygone era when peace was assumed as the default state of international relations. As Buckley suggests, the re-evaluation of nuclear power reflects a shift from the complacency of past assumptions to a recognition of its vital role in addressing contemporary challenges.[17]

16 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press 1992).

17 Andrew Buckley, "Enhancing Extreme Hazard Resilience," in: *Nuclear Engineering International*, October 12, 2023. https://www.neimagazine.com/features/featureenhancing-extreme-hazard-resilience-11213405/.

6. The Case for Nuclear Power: Bridging Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability

To argue effectively for nuclear power, we must first grasp its fundamental potential. The reserves of uranium and thorium—two elements convertible into fissile material for nuclear power generation—are estimated to last tens of thousands of years at current energy consumption rates.[18] This abundance aligns with Martin Heidegger's observation: "The decisive question of science and technology today is no longer: Where do we find sufficient quantities of fuel?"[19] Consequently, the legitimacy of so-called degrowth policies diminishes significantly under such circumstances.

It is crucial to note that uranium deposits are distributed relatively evenly throughout the Earth's crust, with proven technologies enabling uranium extraction from seawater. This distribution ensures no country or cartel can monopolize the uranium market as has occurred with petroleum.[20] Furthermore, nuclear energy's unmatched energy density allows for the stockpiling of fuel years in advance, offering unique energy security advantages.

The development of 4th-generation reactors represents another significant advance, as these can utilize existing radioactive "waste" as fuel. This capability not only reduces waste but aligns perfectly with circular economy principles, positioning nuclear energy as a forward-looking solution.

While it would be oversimplified to assert that global nuclear energy deployment alone can resolve all environmental problems, it is equally untenable to dismiss its potential. Environmental challenges—from land degradation, overpopulation, drought, and deforestation to pollution, biodiversity loss, and species extinction—all stem from humanity's fundamental relationship with nature. At its core, this relationship is profoundly energetic.

The environmental crisis demands a radical reorientation in our approach to energy. This thesis posits that humanity's harm to nature is fundamentally rooted in energy scarcity. Without access to abundant energy, humanity struggles to decouple from nature, relying instead on increasingly efficient technologies

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18 E.g.: James S. Herring, "Origins and Resources of Uranium and Thorium," in: *Encyclopedia of Nuclear Energy*, edited by Eric Greenspan, (Amsterdam/Cambridge/Oxford: Elsevier Science Publishing, 2021 https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780128197257001963. pp. 661–669); or: Nuklearforum Schweiz, "Rohstoff Uran." Kernenergie.ch, February 2021. https://www.kernenergie.ch/de/rohstoff-uran-_content---1--1085.html.

19 Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, transl. By John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 51.

20 Herring, "Origins and Resources of Uranium and Thorium," p. 668.

that, while useful, encounter limits dictated by the laws of physics. For instance, producing hydrogen through electrolysis or maximizing the energy density of lithium batteries confronts intrinsic efficiency constraints.

To achieve a circular economy that fully decouples humanity from nature—creating an ideal, self-contained economic and energetic system—we require not only the highest possible energy efficiency but also an abundant supply of green energy. Consider the immense energy demands of looping the fuel cycle, reusing synthetic fuels post-combustion, or generating hydrogen as a substitute for oil. The viability of such systems depends on energy that is abundant, and hence affordable. Without addressing relative energy scarcity and poverty, a circular economy remains an unreachable ideal.

7. Rethinking Heidegger and Humanity's Instrumental Relationship to Nature

Given that efficiency alone proves insufficient and must be paired with vast amounts of free energy, humanity must decisively embrace its instrumental relationship to nature. This rational reorientation fundamentally shifts our approach to the climate crisis. The goal is no longer to question the exploitation of nature per se but to maximize its efficiency, reducing harmful interactions with nature to an absolute minimum. Consider the stark contrast between the inefficiency of oil drilling and the potential of extracting uranium from seawater, or the numerous environmentally harmful practices that could be replaced through the availability of abundant energy.

Such a reorientation emphasizes the necessity of trusting in a world grounded in instrumental rationality and its exploitative relationship with nature. The environmental crisis does not discredit the rationality of this relationship but rather underscores that humanity's basic interaction with nature need not be abandoned—only enhanced and radicalized. The crisis emerges not from instrumentalization itself but from its insufficient or suboptimal application.

Critiques of anthropocentric domination over nature often misunderstand its role in the climate crisis. Consider Martin Heidegger's assertion that "nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry."[21] While this perspective undeniably explains environmental

21 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 50.

degradation, it implicitly suggests a solution: the intensification of technological exploitation, transforming nature into a uranium and thorium mining district instead. Similarly, Heidegger's observation that "the earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district" highlights a problem rooted in the incomplete application of technology. Nature, fully revealed as a source of energy-dense resources, holds the key to addressing these challenges.

Take agriculture, which Heidegger described as "the mechanized food industry."[22] While this mechanization has indeed caused soil degradation and other ecological issues, these problems arise largely because agriculture remains only partially mechanized. Fully industrialized and robotized agriculture, as exemplified by vertical farming, promises to decouple food production from the soil altogether, severing agriculture's destructive ties to the landscape.

Historical precedents support this trajectory. In developed nations, horses are no longer used for military or industrial purposes—not because of moral outrage over their exploitation, but due to the recognition of their inefficiency compared to automobiles and tanks. This evolution underscores that reducing nature to a mere energy source is not inherently problematic; rather, the issue lies in the inadequate and outdated forms of this reduction.

All examples presented rest on the premise that reducing nature to a mere energy source is not just part of the problem but also part of the solution. Consequently, respect for nature becomes intertwined with its instrumentalization. It remains unclear which represents a greater disrespect to nature: deforestation or failing to harness the energy it freely offers. This perspective redirects the debate from questioning humanity's instrumental relationship with nature as such to interrogating how effectively technologies exploit it. The argument contends that using nature as an instrument is not inherently problematic; rather, the issue lies in the specific, historically contingent forms of exploitation that dominate our current era.

This critique holds little weight for techno-optimists and techno-pessimists who implicitly align with Heidegger's assertion that "technological advance will move faster and faster and can never be stopped." For such thinkers, the question of "[whether] the taming of atomic energy [will be] successful" is not genuinely posed but treated as a foregone conclusion—since the taming of atomic energy "will be successful." They view the advent of "a totally new era of

22 Martin Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology* (New York / London, Garland 1977), pp. 14-15.

technical development" as an inexorable force, one that will reshape our world regardless of our preferences. Moreover, they consider that "what we know now as the technology of film and television, of transportation and especially air transportation, of news reporting, and as medical and nutritional technology, is presumably only a crude start."[23]

Had it been established automatically that "expediting [*Fordern*] is always directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on the maximum yield at minimum expense,"[24] the Earth's surface would long since have been transformed into a vast uranium and thorium mining district. In this scenario, nuclear energy would not account for a mere 5 percent of global energy production but would have displaced up to 90 percent of fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas. This shift would enable humanity to transition from energy scarcity to abundance, supporting energy-intensive initiatives like green hydrogen production or vertical farming. Hence, we remain in the midst of what Martin Heidegger described as "a crude start" to "a totally new era of technical development."[25]

Although this new era has begun, it remains in its infancy. Nuclear energy, leveraging the most energy-dense materials known, offers unparalleled potential but has yet to fulfill its promise. By neglecting the free energy provided by nature, humanity perpetuates its reliance on less efficient and more destructive practices.

The concurrent crises of international relations and environmental challenges might paradoxically serve to rescue humanity from its current predicament. Both crises demand a shift toward greater self-sufficiency and sovereignty, fostering independence from foreign nations and reliance on the natural environment. This alignment paves the way for a renaissance of nuclear power—a nearly carbon-free energy source that significantly enhances sovereignty while dramatically reducing humanity's ecological footprint. Rather than yielding to the pressures of these crises, humanity must harness their transformative potential—much like a satellite uses the "crisis" of an approaching planet's gravitational pull to slingshot itself further into space. Because the path forward is not guaranteed in advance, it demands from us, as humanity, a renewed trust in modernity, technological innovation, and instrumental rationality as guiding principles for reorientation and sustainable progress.

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23 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 51.
24 Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, p. 15.
25 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 51.

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Nataliia Reva defended her doctoral thesis, *Logical and cognitive analysis of the concept of thinking*, at Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv in December 2021. During her PhD studies, Nataliia's philosophical inquiries were logical reasoning, critical thinking, decision-making and cognitive biases. In her dissertation, she examined the impact of cognitive biases on reasoning, focusing on how they can facilitate the logical fallacies and manipulations used in argumentation. Nataliia›s current work is funded by Fundação Araucária - Programa de Acolhida de Cientistas Ucranianos. As a postdoctoral visiting researcher at the Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná in Curitiba, Brazil, she examines the role of embodiment in shaping conceptual understanding, trying to answer questions such as how people understand abstract concepts, such as evil, and how embodiment influences their conceptualization process. Her research draws on insights from phenomenology, cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language.

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The world undergoes profound disorientations and transformations; many societies are increasingly forced to face multiple crises simultaneously. Not only have climate change and mass migrations introduced unprecedented challenges, but fundamental geopolitical shifts and a new war in Ukraine have also destabilized a long-established world order. Political, financial, economic, and societal crises are converging, raising the critical question of how we can navigate multiple crises under intense pressure of time. It is a question that challenges our capacities for orientation, demanding both conceptual clarity and practical responsiveness. In this volume, we present the five best essays from our second philosophical essay prize competition. The authors of the five essays are:

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