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The Complex Emergence Model: Decomposing the Generative Dynamics of Existential Risk

An elaboration of Schmachtenberger's Emergence Model: for understanding the interaction dynamics between civilisational structures, the total conditioning of human agency and the systemic generation of existential risk

Overview

Civilisation can be modelled as a complex of interacting structures – its technological capabilities, its political economy, its cultural psychology – that emergently conditions the behaviour of its population, drives the historical process and generates a particular problem-set.

The history of social theory consists of many such models: Marx's base and superstructure, succeeded by Marvin Harris's cultural materialism (infrastructure, structure and superstructure) and Ken Wilber's four quadrants of interior and exterior, individual and collective. As a synthesis of the two, Daniel Schmachtenberger formulated the *Emergence Model* to map 'all factors that condition human behavior' as part of 'a complex system of feedback and feedforward loops which interaffect each other'.

This article proposes a successor: the *complex emergence model*, which extends the number of civilisational structures from four to eleven. Ultimately, the CEM aims to unify all theories of causation into a holistic account of the generative dynamics of major civilisational problems and systemic existential risk – one that transcends and includes the prevailing tendency within the metacrisis space to attribute primacy to superstructure (culture as an abstract paradigm).

complex systems theory · civilisational structures · human agency · existential risk

Basis

Before co-founding the Civilization Research Institute in 2021, Daniel Schmachtenberger developed an earlier think-tank concept, *The Emergence Project* (2017), oriented towards 'the emergence of a regenerative, thriving, omni-considerate global civilization'. Its central premise was a 'model for successfully addressing the unprecedented complexity and scale' of civilisational problems: the Emergence Model, a four-quadrant framework derived from Ken Wilber's integral theory, into which 'all factors that condition human behavior fit'. This article takes that model as its basis, revisiting its precursors and elaborating it into a successor: the complex emergence model – as a development in applied metatheory.

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