
Kristijan Krkač, *Alone Amidst the Ruins of the Future: Philosophy and Sustainability of Multiple Simultaneous Disasters* (Zagreb: MATE d.o.o., 2025), 228 pp.

The theme of this book is timely and extremely important. Its material is derived from five published papers discussing multiple simultaneous unnatural and natural disasters (MSD) from different perspectives grounded in philosophical thinking, which the author defines as “aligning with established facts, thinking clearly and rationally, and further justifying the principles and methods of rationality and clarity” (47). In the foreword, David Crowther sets the stage with an excellent and provocative discussion of sustainability problems—from the overuse of resources to climate change. He points at the temporal aspect, wherein problems we face today, like global plastic pollution, have been created over the past decades without thought, much less predicting their deleterious impact on the ecosystem and human health. By the same token, “we are expecting that our children and our grandchildren will solve the problems, which we are creating” although there is no foundation for that belief except for an unbounded faith in technological progress and human ingenuity. Under such circumstances it is likely that the severity of natural and unnatural disasters will continue to increase in the future. Also, it becomes increasingly difficult to classify disasters as natural and unnatural because of their close causal relationship.

Starting from these premises, the author brings to readers’ attention the threat of multiple simultaneous unnatural and natural disasters, which challenge the capacity of contemporary societies to predict them, deal with them as they occur, and recover from their impact. An example of MSD is a close temporal succession of extreme spring floods, followed by a dry summer with several heat waves, and late summer storms with rare hailstones. Their combined impact on food production and prices may range from a temporary shock to a societal crisis if they are repeated over several consecutive years. These naturally occurring events are exacerbated by a long-term human impact—greenhouse gas emissions—making it difficult to disentangle the natural from the anthropogenic cause. The reality of MSD and their adverse impact on the human system has been recognized and researched by natural scientists from the perspective of multiple climate hazards, which touch, among others, on food production, health, economy, and security (Mora et al.).

This unprecedented situation creates novel, wicked problems for society and its decision-makers, challenging their established models of how the world works and management habits. As Rising et al. (2022) argue: “The multiplicity of climate hazards and their likely simultaneous and cumulative combination” “takes the climate–social system into a regime never before experienced, and consequently robust, reliable probabilities are rarely a possibility.” In such a situation, as Krkač points out at (94), “the danger of irrational thinking and acting is much bigger due to the fact that these are (for the great majority of humans) completely new circumstances (the duration of COVID-19 pandemic raised many irrational concepts, argumentations, and actions).” Therefore, disbelief or denial of facts that anyone can observe and verify, is dangerous, and human rationality in observing, establishing, constantly checking, and reestablishing or correcting facts is irreplaceable (46–47). If this urge for rationality may seem trivial, recall that the new (2025) US administration withdrew immediately from the Paris Agreement, made major climate science cuts, and decided to increase coal extraction and use.

In the context of overlapping of human and natural causes of disasters, Krkač argues (72) “that there are natural disasters that can be bigger in magnitude because of human-made actions (e.g. floods can be more disastrous because of irrational deforestations of a region or because of lack of proper flood protection).” This is an important ethical and political fact, which will only grow in importance and consequences as MSD becomes more frequent and intense over time. Krkač brings in the case of Croatia’s 2020 earthquake followed by a big hail storm in 2022, which consequences could have been prevented if houses and infrastructure were renewed on time, faster, and more professionally (162–166). In that context, the author stresses the general lack of professionals, prepared civilians, and adequate infrastructure. He argues that however our societies have been prepared to deal with disasters so far, that knowledge is insufficient for the new magnitudes of disasters. Stepping aside from philosophical considerations only, Krkač offers a conceptual solution for MSD signaling (including warning, information, and action guidance), which can be done by a blend of existing communication technologies (182).

Unlike many technological optimists with reductionist thinking, Krkač recognizes that “inventing, accepting, and practicing new social activities, almost a new way of life or culture, seems to be as important as well as inventing new technologies that could prevent MSDs.” This resonates well with many social scientists including the reviewer, who

point to the need to rethink our current economic model and “business as usual” policies especially when considering multiple hazards from climate change. We cannot effectively face novel, wicked problems with old minds.

Krkač makes a valuable insight (118) stating that cases of cumulative impacts from causally unrelated MSDs, or in those in which particular disasters are causally connected, can be understood as a “single phenomenon with its many disaster aspects.” This insight stimulates system thinking about MSDs and their possible impacts on human system. Floods and droughts are causally unrelated but their intensity and frequency arises from a common anthropogenic cause—the global warming. Add the possibility of an agricultural pest outbreak, because of an extremely wet spring, and you will grasp the meaning of the “single phenomenon with its many disaster aspects.”

The author notes a notable rise in the number, suddenness, strength, speed, and magnitude of disasters (heat waves, fires, floods, or similar) and the fact that the present infrastructure isn’t built for such MSDs. This contributes significantly to the deleterious effects of many ongoing disasters. Pointing to our lack of know-how to deal with these new circumstances and phenomena, our ignorance of new phenomena, and the lack of understanding their reality, and sometimes even denying their reality, Krkač asks the fundamental question: “*Do we or don’t we understand the world in which we found ourselves in the 21st century?*” (168–169) (italics are mine). This is, in my view, the key philosophical conundrum of our times, and the answer to it may be poetically found in the title of the book itself “Alone amidst the ruins of the future...”

Those familiar with the IPCC projections and scenarios related to different magnitude of global warming (IPCC 2023) will easily resonate with Krkač’s genuinely human concern (170): “if disasters (MSDs) became more frequent, sudden, bigger, and deadly, what should we do, and do we understand what does it mean to do anything and live under extreme circumstances?” I would add, can we really understand something we have not experienced yet? Those harsh life conditions that are probabilistically distributed in the future of our children and grandchildren? Can society respond adequately to challenges, which existential consequences will not be borne by the current decision makers?

Krkač’s philosophical inquiry leads him to another fundamental issue: “If a general question should be asked, it seems to be the one about the change of our way or form of life. Can we and are we willing to change our way or form of life, and if so, are we able to change it, and not only

to change it, but to change it fast enough, because MSDs aren't slowing down and waiting for us to get ready for them, rather opposite, they are becoming stronger, and more sudden not carrying are we prepared or not?" This is the question of all questions for social scientists dealing with climate change and sustainability, and it touches upon the adequacy of capitalist societies to respond in a timely and effective manner to these challenges (O'Connor 1994; Klein 2014).

Krkač ends the book with the conviction that "what seems to be necessary is the change in the way we act, and eventually in our way of life (Wittgenstein would say *Lebensform*, our culture, daily habits, routines, and practices) regardless of the fact that such change may not be sufficient or that it may be too late, but this seems to be a human thing to do because in the beginning was the deed." In this regard, I completely agree with the author: the future remains open, and we carry both an ethical and human responsibility to contribute in any way possible toward potential solutions.

On the technical side, the book struggles with adapting the journal format to a book format, leading to some unclear figures. However, its greatest value lies in its ability to foster critical thinking about multiple simultaneous disasters and their consequences—an outcome that would undoubtedly align with the author's philosophical intent.

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