

Metaphysical Singularity: From Civilizational Cohesion to Fragmented Hyperplurality

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Abstract

Throughout much of human history, metaphysical systems functioned not merely as philosophical explanations of existence but as large-scale mechanisms of social integration. Shared sacred narratives enabled cooperation among individuals far beyond the cognitive limits of small tribal structures, stabilizing trust, moral coordination, and collective identity across expanding civilizations. Drawing on the works of Norenzayan (2013), Dunbar (1996), and Durkheim (1995/1912), this paper argues that metaphysical frameworks historically played a central role in overcoming the biological constraints of human sociality. However, the informational and cultural conditions of modern hyperconnected societies have fundamentally altered this dynamic. Under conditions of hyperplurality, algorithmic amplification, and the collapse of singular symbolic authorities, metaphysical systems increasingly lose their integrative capacity and become generators of fragmentation, identity conflict, and epistemic polarization. This paper introduces the concept of “Metaphysical Singularity” to describe the historical threshold at which metaphysical systems cease to function primarily as mechanisms of civilizational cohesion and instead begin to produce the opposite effect. Rather than presenting a normative critique of metaphysics itself, the paper offers a structural analysis of how changing social and cognitive environments transform the function of metaphysical systems across history.

Keywords

Keywords: metaphysics; social cohesion; hyperplurality; collective identity; cognitive anthropology; sociology of religion; fragmentation; symbolic systems; civilization; metaphysical singularity.

1. Introduction

One of the central problems of civilization has always been the problem of large-scale cooperation. Human beings evolved in relatively small social groups, yet eventually formed empires, religions, nation-states, and complex symbolic orders involving millions of individuals who would never directly know one another. The emergence of large civilizations required mechanisms capable of extending trust, shared meaning, and social coordination beyond immediate kinship structures.

For much of human history, metaphysical systems fulfilled this role. Religious cosmologies, sacred narratives, divine moral authority, and transcendent frameworks created common symbolic environments through which strangers could cooperate, sacrifice, obey norms, and identify

themselves as part of a larger collective structure. Metaphysics was not merely speculative philosophy. It functioned as a civilizational technology of cohesion.

However, the contemporary world presents a radically different social environment. Hyperconnectivity, globalization, mass digital communication, ideological proliferation, and the fragmentation of epistemic authority have produced unprecedented levels of narrative competition. Individuals are now exposed simultaneously to countless incompatible metaphysical, ideological, political, and moral systems. Under these conditions, frameworks that once stabilized social unity increasingly contribute to polarization and identity fragmentation.

This paper argues that metaphysical systems historically enabled large-scale social cohesion but, under conditions of modern hyperplurality and informational saturation, increasingly lose their integrative function and become sources of fragmentation. To conceptualize this transition, the paper introduces the term “Metaphysical Singularity,” referring to the historical threshold at which the social function of metaphysical systems undergoes a structural reversal.

2. Metaphysics as a Mechanism of Large-Scale Cohesion

2.1 Cognitive Limits and Human Sociality

Human social cognition evolved under biological constraints. According to Dunbar (1996), the neocortical structure of the human brain imposes limitations on the number of stable social relationships individuals can effectively maintain. The well-known “Dunbar number” proposes that human beings can sustain approximately 150 meaningful social relationships under ordinary cognitive conditions.

This creates a fundamental problem for civilization. How can cooperation emerge among thousands or millions of individuals whose brains evolved primarily for small-group interaction?

Large-scale societies require forms of cohesion that extend beyond direct familiarity. Biological trust alone is insufficient for sustaining complex civilizations. Some additional symbolic structure becomes necessary to stabilize cooperation across strangers.

2.2 Big Gods and the Expansion of Cooperation

Norenzayan (2013) argues that belief in morally concerned supernatural agents played a crucial role in the expansion of human cooperation. In early tribal environments, social order was maintained largely through direct monitoring and kinship relations. As societies expanded, however, direct interpersonal surveillance became impossible.

Moralizing gods functioned as symbolic extensions of social monitoring. Individuals who believed themselves constantly observed by supernatural authorities became more likely to follow social norms even in anonymous contexts. Shared metaphysical systems therefore reduced distrust

among strangers and enabled cooperation at scales previously unattainable within purely tribal structures.

This development represented a major civilizational transition. Metaphysical narratives transformed isolated biological groups into large symbolic communities unified through shared sacred structures.

2.3 Ritual, Symbolism, and Collective Integration

The sociological work of Durkheim (1995/1912) further illuminates the integrative role of metaphysical systems. Durkheim argued that religious rituals generate forms of collective emotional synchronization that reinforce social cohesion. Through shared symbols, ceremonies, myths, and sacred distinctions, societies construct collective identities that transcend individual subjectivity.

In this sense, metaphysics historically provided more than explanation. It generated emotional coherence, symbolic continuity, and social orientation. Civilizations were not held together merely through force or rational agreement, but through shared participation in transcendent symbolic worlds.

For much of history, metaphysical systems solved a core problem of civilization: how to maintain cohesion beyond the scale permitted by biological evolution alone.

3. Modern Hyperplurality and the Fragmentation of Shared Meaning

3.1 The Collapse of Singular Symbolic Authority

The modern world radically transformed the conditions under which metaphysical systems operate. Scientific development, secularization, globalization, mass literacy, and digital communication weakened the dominance of singular symbolic authorities. Individuals no longer inhabit isolated narrative environments. Competing worldviews now coexist simultaneously within the same informational space.

Pre-modern societies often maintained relatively stable symbolic monopolies. Most individuals were embedded within a single religious, cultural, or metaphysical structure throughout their lives. Contemporary societies differ fundamentally. The modern individual is continuously exposed to competing truth systems, incompatible moral frameworks, and conflicting ontologies.

This transition does not necessarily eliminate metaphysical belief. Rather, it destabilizes the integrative monopoly previously held by any single metaphysical framework.

3.2 Hyperconnectivity and Identity Fragmentation

Digital hyperconnectivity intensifies this process. Algorithmic systems amplify ideological clustering, emotional outrage, and identity reinforcement. Online environments allow individuals to organize around increasingly narrow symbolic identities while simultaneously deepening antagonism toward competing groups.

Under such conditions, metaphysical systems no longer primarily function as universalizing structures. Instead, they frequently become markers of differentiation and tribal identity. The same symbolic intensity that historically produced cohesion within civilizations can now produce fragmentation between micro-communities occupying the same informational environment.

The result is not necessarily the disappearance of belief, but the multiplication of mutually incompatible systems competing for legitimacy within shared social space.

3.3 The Erosion of Integrative Metaphysical Frameworks

Historically, metaphysical systems derived much of their stabilizing power from relative symbolic exclusivity. Modern hyperplurality weakens this exclusivity. When individuals continuously encounter alternative sacred systems, competing moral absolutes, and contradictory truth claims, the universal integrative function of any singular metaphysical framework becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

This creates a structural transformation in the social role of metaphysics itself.

4. Metaphysical Singularity

4.1 Defining Metaphysical Singularity

Metaphysical Singularity refers to a historical-social threshold at which metaphysical systems undergo a reversal in social function. Rather than primarily serving as integrative symbolic frameworks for large-scale civilizational cohesion, they increasingly begin to operate as centrifugal forces that intensify fragmentation under conditions of hyperplurality and informational saturation.

The term does not refer simply to the decline of religion, the disappearance of metaphysics, or the mere proliferation of competing beliefs. Nor does it deny that metaphysical systems can still produce local forms of solidarity. Rather, it identifies the point at which the same symbolic mechanisms that once expanded cooperation across large populations begin, beyond a certain threshold of narrative competition and informational complexity, to intensify identity division, epistemic fragmentation, and conflict between coexisting frameworks of meaning.

4.2 Functional Reversal

This transition represents a functional reversal rather than a simple decline. Historically, metaphysical systems reduced uncertainty by establishing shared symbolic horizons. In highly pluralized societies, however, competing metaphysical systems increasingly produce mutually exclusive realities.

As exposure to competing truth systems intensifies, symbolic frameworks become less capable of universal integration and more likely to function as defensive identity structures. Metaphysical commitment becomes increasingly tied to group differentiation rather than civilizational unification.

The mechanism itself remains active, but its social consequences change.

4.3 Nonlinear Transformation

The concept of Metaphysical Singularity can be understood as a nonlinear transformation in social organization. Systems often maintain stability until reaching thresholds beyond which previous regulatory mechanisms no longer generate the same outcomes. In this context, modern informational density, hyperconnectivity, and narrative saturation alter the functional dynamics of metaphysical cohesion.

The historical conditions that once enabled metaphysical systems to unify civilizations may no longer exist in the same form.

5. Contemporary Illustrations

Contemporary digital environments provide visible examples of this transformation. Online ideological communities increasingly organize around incompatible moral and metaphysical certainties, often reinforcing polarization rather than shared social orientation. Religious identity, political absolutism, and competing moral frameworks become embedded within algorithmically amplified tribal structures.

The issue is not confined to religion alone. Secular ideologies can function similarly when transformed into totalizing symbolic systems resistant to negotiation or coexistence. Under conditions of hyperplurality, many forms of absolute meaning risk becoming centrifugal rather than integrative.

This fragmentation is intensified by the speed of digital communication, emotional contagion, and the collapse of shared epistemic authority.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

This paper presents a conceptual framework rather than an empirical model. The term “Metaphysical Singularity” is introduced as a theoretical lens for understanding transformations in the social function of metaphysical systems under modern informational conditions. Future work may explore empirical indicators of integrative decline, comparative cross-cultural analysis, and the emergence of alternative post-metaphysical forms of social cohesion.

Additionally, the present paper does not argue that metaphysical systems universally fail under all modern conditions. In many societies, religious and metaphysical frameworks continue to generate local solidarity and collective meaning. The argument instead concerns the declining capacity of singular metaphysical systems to sustain universal integration within increasingly hyperplural and hyperconnected environments.

7. Conclusion

Metaphysical systems were among the most powerful civilizational technologies in human history. They enabled cooperation beyond biological tribal limits, stabilized collective identity, and provided symbolic coherence across large populations. The emergence of complex civilization would likely have been impossible without them.

Yet the informational and social architecture of modernity has transformed the conditions under which metaphysical systems operate. Hyperplurality, hyperconnectivity, and narrative competition increasingly weaken the integrative monopoly once sustained by shared sacred frameworks. Under these conditions, metaphysical systems may undergo a structural reversal in social function, producing fragmentation where they once produced cohesion.

The concept of Metaphysical Singularity attempts to describe this historical transition. Whether future societies develop alternative mechanisms of large-scale cohesion remains an open question. What appears increasingly clear, however, is that the symbolic conditions sustaining pre-modern metaphysical integration no longer exist in the same form within the contemporary world.

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