

Everyday in our newspapers we read about more entanglements of all those things that were once imagined to be separable -- science, morality, religion, law, technology, finance, and politics. But these things are tangled up together everywhere: in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in the space shuttle, and in the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

If you envision a future in which there will be less and less of these entanglements thanks to Science, capital S, you are a modernist. But if you brace yourself for a future in which there will always be more of these imbroglios, mixing many more heterogeneous actors, at a greater and greater scale and at an ever-tinier level of intimacy requiring even more detailed care, then you are... what? A compositionist!

The dominant, peculiar story of modernity is of humankind's emancipation from Nature.

Modernity is the thrusting-forward arrow of time -- Progress -- characterized by its juvenile enthusiasm, risk taking, frontier spirit, optimism, and indifference to the past. The spirit can be summarized in a single sentence: "Tomorrow, we will be able to separate more accurately what the world is really like from the subjective illusions we used to entertain about it."

The very forward movement of the arrow of time and the frontier spirit associated with it (the modernizing front) is due to a certain conception of knowledge: "Tomorrow, we will be able to differentiate clearly what in the past was still mixed up, namely facts and values, thanks to Science."

Science is the shibboleth that defines the right direction of the arrow of time because it, and only it, is able to cut into two well-separated parts what had, in the past, remained hopelessly confused: a morass of ideology, emotions, and values on the one hand, and, on the other, stark and naked matters of fact.

The notion of the past as an archaic and dangerous confusion arises directly from giving Science this role. A modernist, in this great narrative, is the one who expects from Science the revelation that Nature will finally be visible through the veils of subjectivity -- and subjection -- that hid it from our ancestors.