

# Title: The Crisis of Modernity as a Crisis of Spirit and Thought: Towards the Establishment of a Humanistic and Civilised Policy through Future Education and Art in the Thought of Edgar Morin

**Amri Chahrazed**

Dr., University of Ziane Achour, Djelfa (Algeria), E-mail: amri.chahrazed@univ-djelfa.dz

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## Abstract

Edgar Morin is regarded as one of the most prominent French philosophers and is known for his critical contributions aimed at dismantling the foundations and principles of modernity, which are rooted in excessive rationalism and transcendent anthropocentrism. These very principles, he argues, have plunged the world into a dual crisis: a spiritual crisis and an intellectual crisis. As a result, modernity has deviated from its intended role of fostering progress and development, instead becoming a catalyst for wars and discord. To overcome these crises, Morin emphasises the urgent need to focus on the pillars of civilisation, namely, education and art, and, more importantly, to reform thought and critique blind reason.

**Keywords:** modernity, complex thought, future-oriented education.

## Introduction

Due to the rapid growth of scientific and technological discourse, Western civilisation has undergone development across all domains. Reason came to occupy a central position as the sole source of knowledge, possessing the capacity to uncover truth and to serve as the legislator overseeing all social, political, and economic systems. It became embedded in the very core of human existence. Consequently, Western civilisation became directly associated with rationality, modernity, and scientific progress. However, Edgar Morin perceived various forms of marginalisation and exclusion in these notions and manifestations of human suffering brought about by the outcomes and consequences of these transformations and events. Science and reason, according to him, have become sources of anxiety and even threats to human

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extinction. On this basis, Morin deemed it necessary to interrogate this Western civilisation, which has posed a real threat to humanity and led to crises at all levels.

### A. The crisis of modernity as a crisis of spirit and thought in the spirit of Edgar Morin

The crisis of modernity began with fluctuations in science, which claimed to approach truth and lay the foundations for a genuine theory of the universe. However, science ultimately deviated from its purpose of reform and achieving progress and prosperity. It was once considered a moral guarantee, and the dynamics of the sciences were thought to carry a shared mission: the pursuit of certainty.<sup>1</sup> However, Edgar Morin held a contrary view. From his perspective, scientific progress has engendered ever-accelerated and expanding crises. The forms of development in science, technology, industry, and economics that currently drive the planet are no longer governed by politics, ethics, or thought. Instead, what was supposed to secure human advancement has produced deadly dangers for humanity.

According to Edgar Morin, modernity was founded on three fundamental pillars, which he termed the great myths that, in his view, govern the world, dominate its conceptions, and shape the future of humanity:

- a. **Myth of control over the Universe:** advocated by thinkers such as Descartes, Buffon, and Marx.
- b. **The Myth of Progress and Historical Necessity,** which came to assert itself with Condorcet.
- c. **The Myth of Happiness:** disseminated by the media from the nineteenth century until the 1960s, promoting the idea that happiness had become attainable for individuals in contemporary civilisation.<sup>2</sup>

In the twentieth century, what was referred to as "absolute modernity" manifested as a tremendous advancement in science and technology, accompanied by a mode of thinking grounded in rationalisation, control, and calculation, a mode of

thought incapable of comprehending life, emotion, and spirit. Edgar Morin explicitly stated his indebtedness to Nietzsche for coining the phrase "crisis of foundations." He asserted that we must learn to think without foundations, for even the pillars of science, as Karl Popper concluded, are planted in the mud.

Thus, science has become a double-edged sword. While it produces new knowledge that endows us with immense capacities to develop and enrich our lives, it simultaneously generates immense powers of destruction. This is evident in the terrifying proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among societies and nations and in the human decline accompanying the continued degradation of the biosphere resulting from unchecked development.

A similar dilemma has emerged in the technological realm: technology enables us to control physical energies, just as it allows us to exert control over human energies. Society has been subjected to the logic of artificiality, which is based on excessive rationalisation and hyperregulation of time. This has provoked an adverse reaction manifested in tendencies toward manipulation, rebellion, and indifference.

According to Morin, this stems from the fact that the proponents of progress are ignorant of all that cannot be quantified or measured; that is, they are blind to life, suffering, joy, and love. Their sole criterion for satisfaction is the growth of production, productivity, and monetary income. In so doing, they have fostered moral and psychological regression.<sup>3</sup>

Although technology is, in essence, a positive phenomenon, it has also encompassed all that is problematic, harmful, and destructive within Western civilisation. This has stripped it of its core, shaken its certainties, and undermined its foundational myths of progress, happiness, and mastery worldwide. The future has become uncertain, and modernity has fallen into a paradoxical bound: the more it gains control over

material forces, the more it degenerates into the vital realm. This has culminated in a crisis of spirit and thought, a spiritual void, and a rupture between the body and the soul. Most solutions have become part of the problem, and this crisis has entrenched negative concepts such as false rationality.

### **B. False Rationality in Edgar Morin's Thought: Beyond the Enlightenment**

Rationalism came to dominate Western civilisation, characterised by a tendency to reject anything that transcends human capability and a pronounced emphasis on the mental faculties of humanity. It places strong faith in the vital value of reason and its capacity for understanding and gaining insight. This reason, which became increasingly emancipated and developed during the eighteenth century, was seen as the critical reason, a force confronting all myths and religions and one that claimed it would lead humanity towards progress. It aspired to become the very law that governs history. Through it, philosophy would be liberated from the constraints of superstition, enabling access to essential truths about reality, the nature of the human mind, and the cosmos and its contents.<sup>4</sup>

The Enlightenment thinkers exalted reason as the sole principle for organising individual and collective life.<sup>5</sup>

Rationalism portrayed society as being governed by reason, viewed as the sole instrument capable of liberating human nature from all surrounding forms of authority. However, this view did not endure for long. The situation quickly shifted, even among the enlightenment philosophers themselves. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, acknowledged that civilisation causes humanity to deteriorate. Progress was no longer conceived as a constant triumph of the better but rather as a crisis-ridden state. Evidence of this lies in the fear and submission that gradually developed towards reason. Although reason was hailed as the source of enlightenment, it proved incapable of generating comprehensive visions.

Many philosophers before Edgar Morin anticipated this stance, including Michel Foucault, who

criticised the rationalism of modern society, particularly that embodied in Cartesian philosophy, which glorifies reason and exalts its power while excluding all that contradicts or opposes it. This perspective tends to treat reason as something sacred.<sup>6</sup>

Both Edgar Morin and Michel Foucault saw a form of authority in this mode of thinking that enacts exclusion. It is a false rationality, an abstract, one-dimensional form that Edgar Morin characterises as fragmented rationality: its intelligence is scattered and reductive. It dissects the world's complexity into isolated parts, fragments problems, dissolves interconnectedness, and reduces multidimensional reality to a single dimension. It is a short-sighted intelligence that undermines the possibility of understanding and reflective thought, thus eliminating any path toward sound judgment or long-term vision.<sup>7</sup>

Rationality's primary concern was not the intellectual or social ascent achieved through the realisation of the common good or the consolidation of human unity. In contrast, it emerged in an opposing form, dividing, fragmenting, and segregating people under the pressure of a governing authority that organises and subjugates them. In the name of science and technology, rationality granted itself the authority to exclude any notion of reform, marginalising and rejecting the weak and the oppressed. As a centralised power, it branched out into networks and authorities, one of the most extreme manifestations and outcomes of which was the barbarity that unfolded throughout the history of Western culture.

### **C. European Culture and Its Barbarity**

Edgar Morin presents the world as a theatre of war, where humanity has regressed into barbarism, manifesting in the form of conflicts and disputes driven by ethnic and religious motives. Violence and crime have swept across the globe, with vengeance replacing the rule of justice. Rationality has become a homeland and terrain for slaughter and brutality. A new form of barbarity has emerged, one that no longer bears the traditional traits of

savagery but rather a cold barbarity embodied in the technology unique to our civilisation.

This is the barbarity of a racist, irrational human being who posits himself as the sole point of reference, refusing to be held to any ethical standard beyond himself or the other. He is firmly convinced that his superiority is intrinsic to his very being, just as the inferiority of the other is inherently embedded within them. The racist individual constantly seeks empirical indicators to reinforce his sense of superiority while cultivating a sense of inferiority in the other.

Modern Western civilisation has enabled such racism. It represents a progressive and continuous decline in humanistic philosophy, which once affirmed human autonomy from nature and materiality. A steady and proportional rise matches this decline in material monism or comprehensive secularism, which marginalises human beings and their cognitive and moral frameworks, equating them with natural phenomena.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, it annihilates and erases the human as an autonomous being possessing intrinsic value beyond the physical laws of material motion.

Consequently, violence has come to dominate judgment across multiple domains. For the first time, the world appears to have unified through violence, as although the demons of Satan have taken root within, and everyone seems to be pitted against everyone else. Violence is the guiding force, and time acceleration is striking in the rapid succession of events. Specific trajectories and catalysts drive every occurrence.

Globalisation, with its barbaric and brutal manifestations or its law of the strongest, spares no one from contemplating its consequences, mainly through the lens of concepts associated with modernity and postmodernity.<sup>9</sup> Nations have thus begun to fear disintegration and the loss of identity, prompting urgent calls for awareness. The prevailing perception of the other as a savage enemy, a complete antithesis with whom coexistence is deemed impossible, has hindered our capacity to adapt, not only with others but also with ourselves.

This alienation stems from our enthrallment with the allure of technology, which has turned us inwards against ourselves and brought its unique barbarity: the barbarity of cold, glacial, absolute calculation, a rationality utterly oblivious to the emotional realities that define the human condition.

Edgar Morin offers a vivid example of the rupture afflicting human emotions and sentiments: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he describes as a cancer that threatens to metastasise and spread across all regions of the globe. New epicentres of conflict have already been created.<sup>10</sup> Even France has witnessed bloody confrontations fuelled by hatred and violence, becoming a stage for an ethnic war in which the state has failed to assert control, implement its policies, or organise itself. According to Morin, neither France nor any other nation will be able to withstand such deviations unless it retreats into its religion and nationalism to defend itself against threats to its internal and external security.

In this context, terrorism serves as a prime example. It acts as a complicit façade and a mechanism of reactive force, a necessary power embodying violence as a rejection of all forms of distinction, judgment, and exclusion. It justifies its legitimacy by presenting itself as a vital counterforce capable of dismantling the destructive power of a chaotic globalisation. It represents a force of death, opposing any positive force aimed at comprehensive reconciliation. Acts of terrorism, then, are an excessive reflection of the violence inherent in this particular global order, and they may lead to fragmentation of the world system.

Terrorism is distinct in that it wagers on death, which is, without question, the ultimate form of distinction.<sup>11</sup> Edgar Morin urgently warned against creating fertile ground for terrorism. Excessive force exercised by the system may draw it into a violent game governed by destructive rules, where terrorism confronts terrorism, thus existing beyond its intended purpose, in a sense. It becomes violence that surpasses violence.

### **D. Transcending Rationality and Modernity: Reforming Thought and Critiquing Blind Reason—Complexity as a Composite Thought**

Edgar Morin viewed modern society's rational thinking as a form of authority that enacts exclusion and marginalisation. Globalisation, as a phenomenon deeply embedded in these societies, confirmed the unreliability of the future. Although it laid the groundwork for a global community, it has proven incapable of inaugurating such a community and actively hinders its emergence. Moreover, its economic and technological development has produced nothing but moral and psychological decline linked to an inflated sense of self and extreme individualism marked by selfishness.

This individualism, while generating material comfort, has simultaneously spread misery. Civil openness has increased anxiety and boredom, and isolated power has led to death. Edgar Morin referred to modernity and rationality as "diseases of civilisation", which must be eradicated before they eradicate us.

We must understand modernity's uncertainty for what it truly is: a whirlwind, cyclical process in which every element contributes to the formation of all others. What is merely possible may occur, and what is improbable may become probable. We must always wager on the improbable. This requires trust and hope in individuals' regenerative capacities.

Humans can transform their way of thinking once they become aware of the worsening crisis. We must lay the foundations for a genuine, open rationality that recognises the limits of logic, truth, and mechanistic reasoning and that understands that human thought will never be omniscient. This rationality must dialogue with reality, reassess reason, and transcend abstract rationality and fragmented, instrumental thinking. We must build bridges between reason and emotion and between rationality and affect.

This is achievable only through the reform of thought and the creation of a new epistemology, a new method and logic whose essential task is not to

imprison the world within fixed essences and truths. Edgar Morin calls this *complex thought* a mode of thinking tasked with transforming the world's identity and the tools with which we understand it—tools that cannot be found in compartmentalised sciences divorced from one another.

Complex thought represents all sciences and disciplines unified within a single horizon and project: the horizon of complexity. It is a thought that believes in the possibility of assembling and unifying multiplicity. The central task of scientific knowledge is to dispel the apparent complexity of phenomena to reveal the simple order that underlies them. It must be demonstrated that simplified forms of knowledge distort reality more than they represent it. Such distortions are the product of blind reason, which destroys wholes and totalities and is incapable of grasping the inseparable link between the observer and the observed.

Here, Edgar Morin issues a grave accusation against those responsible for the profound transformation of knowledge. Scientific knowledge is no longer generated to be reflected upon or debated; it is instead stored in informational memory banks and manipulated by unknown forces. Tragically, this distorted, one-dimensional vision has dangerous consequences for human phenomena: distortion mutilates bodies, spills blood, and spreads suffering.

### **G. Overcoming the crisis: A policy of civilisation**

Edgar Morin called for the urgent need to find pathways and solutions to overcome the crisis and to restore human dignity through the unconditional care of individuals materially, socially, and psychologically. From this starting point, he proposed a project he referred to as the *rational outline of a global society*, which, in his view, would provide the conditions for human comfort and tranquillity.

This outline included a call to resist all forms of injustice and oppression and a readiness to change the prevailing order that has subjugated humanity and failed to acknowledge its worth. This transformation, he argued, can be achieved only by reconstructing the foundations of education and

culture and fostering a deep appreciation for the arts.

## H. Education for Building a Viable Future: The Essence of Future-Oriented Education

Edgar Morin considers education one of the most powerful tools for achieving meaningful change. This recognition necessitates a fundamental reshaping of our educational policies and programs. We bear a profound responsibility towards future generations.

In this context, Morin identified seven essential areas of knowledge that future-oriented education must incorporate:

### The Seven Necessary Forms of Knowledge(1)

1. **Types of cognitive blindness: Error and illusion**
2. Education remains unaware of the nature of human knowledge. Thus, it is imperative to integrate and develop studies of the neurological, psychological, and cultural dimensions of human knowledge to avoid errors and illusions.
3. **Principles of Pertinent Knowledge**
4. Teaching methods that represent relationships and interactions between parts and wholes within a complex world are essential.
5. **Teaching the Human Condition**
6. Education must acknowledge the unity of human beings and their complex nature by fostering the integration of all branches of knowledge.
7. **Teaching Earthly Identity**
8. Education must instill the idea of a shared destiny among all human beings.
9. **Confronting Uncertainties**
10. We must abandon deterministic views of human history and cultivate the virtue of anticipating the unexpected to confront it better.
11. **Teaching Understanding**
12. The development of understanding requires transforming mentalities, with particular emphasis on studying the roots and patterns of misunderstanding stemming from the foundations of racism.
13. **Ethics of the Human Species**
14. Two moral and political goals must be pursued:

- Building a relationship of mutual oversight between society and individuals through democracy
- Achieving humanity as a collective or planetary community.

### A. Culture as a Means of Realising Human Humanity

Edgar Morin describes culture as the product of the capacities of the human mind, making it a fundamental condition for the fulfilment of the concept of humanity. He argues that contradiction lies at the heart of science: the more knowledge we acquire, the less we understand the human being. By dissecting humans, we eliminate wonder and question concerning human identity.

Morin criticises structuralism, particularly the approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who asserted that the goal of the human sciences is not to reveal the human being but to deconstruct it. In this view, the human is not recognised as a subject, a consciousness, or a will but rather as an entity engulfed by the unconscious from all sides. Although Lévi-Strauss showed concern for reason, he spoke of a reason that belongs to no subject, attributing human reason primarily to unconscious activity.<sup>12</sup>

Edgar Morin appears here to be influenced, at least on the surface, by a humanist tendency rooted in the knowledge of the human being one that aims to evaluate and affirm the human while rejecting anything that alienates the individual from their essence, whether by subjecting them to forces or truths beyond human nature or by degrading their humanity through inferior forms of utilisation.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Morin calls upon us to draw from the well of universal humanism that took shape in the past. However, he also raises a critical question: Is it still possible to regenerate a new form of humanism today?

The politics of humanity must, by necessity, realise justice for all. It must be dedicated to creating and preserving common planetary goods. It must transcend principles of reduction and separation, fostering integration among civilisations and the

sciences. It must also seek to enhance the natural illumination of reason.<sup>14</sup>

Such politics must subject the powers of science, technology, and industry to ethical oversight. Hence, the knowledge of human beings must become more scientific, philosophical, and ultimately poetic to comprehend the Earth in its entirety, including its past, future, limitations, and transformations. All the changes carry meaning, and all the constants are foundational.

The inhumane acts committed by figures such as Hitler and Stalin, slavery, concentration camps, and genocide stand as grim testaments to humanity.<sup>15</sup> Today, the human problem is no longer merely a question of knowledge but of humanity's destiny. Awareness of a shared earthly fate remains deeply fragmented.<sup>16</sup>

### **Th. Art: The Contribution of Art and Aesthetics to the Poetics of Life**

Edgar Morin was known for his passion for beauty and refined art appreciation from childhood. Despite enduring the hardships of orphanhood, deprivation, and cruelty, art became his refuge. He stated that he would escape those feelings of detestability through elevated artistic works, such as the poetry of Baudelaire. His interest in art was never driven by amusement or diversion but rather by its significance and value, as it enabled him to comprehend the human condition in all its contradictions, to unveil truths, and to reflect upon destiny and outcome.

Morin says aesthetics is one of clarity and serenity, far removed from any religious or political ideology. It is a realm of aesthetic emotion.

Certain novels also captivated him for their psychological or social depth and their historical, political, and philosophical dimensions. These great works transcend time, continents, and nations. They arise from creative emotion, a joyful and radiant vision where the artist calls upon the powers of the unconscious (inspiration) and the conscious (refinement and revision).<sup>17</sup>

Morin admires the discourse of art, seeing it as a domain that kindles the modes of being and helps us endure the unbearable excesses of reality. Through memory, it brings to consciousness the images of the victims of Western Europe's barbarism, manifested in the enslavement and subjugation of colonised peoples.

Aesthetic knowledge may provide positive energy that nourishes our judgment and daily decisions. For Morin, the meaning of life is revealed only through *participation* in sharing beauty and art with others. Alongside love, this represents the only proper remedy for death and the bitterness of life. The value of beauty lies in its role as a magnificent antidote to fear, terror, anxiety, and death.

Edgar Morin called for the education of future generations in aesthetics and the arts and even the reeducation of society through them. He believed that the arts carry political messages that enable mutual understanding when deeply rooted within us. He maintained that it is not enough merely to teach literature and poetry in schools; their books should be distributed freely because they are more vital than textbooks are. Students should memorise and internalise them. Thus, integrating arts and aesthetics into education has led to profound reform and a foundational educational revolution.

### **D. Directives of a Policy of Civilisation: Reconstructing Politics and Establishing a Humanistic Policy**

Edgar Morin revisited the issue of civilisation-building through a political lens. Within this horizon, he affirmed that all human problems today have become political. He sought to construct a new framework of laws and principles to govern this process, which he referred to as the directives of a *policy of civilisation*.

#### **1. The Politics of Solidarity<sup>18</sup>**

2. This is not about creating a new set of ethics but rather about returning to a concrete morality that we urgently need today. It involves liberating the untapped power of goodwill and encouraging behaviours rooted in solidarity. Political leaders are responsible for opening this path, offering

guarantees, and making its realisation possible. In this context, Morin proposed the establishment of *solidarity centers* in city spaces that serve as crisis hubs, are designed to respond to urgent ethical needs, and are staffed by active citizens and teams of volunteers.

### 3. The Politics of Quality of Life

4. Quality of life is expressed not only through material comfort but also through existential meaning. It encompasses the richness of interpersonal communication and emotional participation. This calls for the *integration of civilisation* policies into broader political strategies. However, politics aims not to create happiness but to eliminate general causes of misery, such as war, famine, and violence.

The politics of civilisation cannot generate a quality of life in itself. However, it must exert influence over the social and civilisational domains by supporting, extending, and deepening civil society's spontaneous resistance, mainly through the struggle to build conviviality and promote virtue.

### 5. The Politics of Rootedness and Reconnection: Towards a Politics of Revitalisation

The role of a *civilisation* policy is to defend and revitalise society's human, social, and cultural fabric. Genuine anxiety is rooted in the experience of losing one's grounding, one's connection to one's place and one's identity. This cannot be resolved merely through policies of isolation or self-withdrawal aimed at shielding communities from fragmentation and disappearance. Standardisation, excessive planning, and the erosion of identities

tend to destroy cultural diversity and have deep roots.

### Conclusion

Edgar Morin sought to uncover the primary mechanisms behind the alienation of contemporary humanity, which, in his view, stem from the impossibility of individual initiative and the loss of truth due to the inability or outright failure of vision in an era dominated by media and mass manipulation. In this context, the boldness of Morin's thought clearly emerges, reflecting a defining feature of his philosophy in an age characterised by space exploration, where our time no longer permits the formation of clearly defined philosophical systems or thought frameworks. This is due mainly to the increasing complexity and multifaceted nature of reality. Technology has become the chief determinant of ideas, behaviours, and tastes, demanding that the philosopher guide leading thought into new contexts aimed at renewal, even in the tools and methods of inquiry. Therefore, philosophy's task is to remain committed to a perspective that transcends boundaries and challenges foundations. The ability to philosophise nourishes the capacity of the self to achieve liberation. It is a pure intentionality that seeks to devise a plan for creative action that resists mechanical repetition. This means fostering new attitudes and cultivating the individual's free capacities within the constraints of a determined reality.

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