

modern; impressionism is surpassed by expressionism, and Van Gogh's paintings are realistic compared with those of surrealists. But in spite of the relativity of what a generation feels to be "modern", all these writers and artists still have something in common that distinguishes them sharply from a seventeenth-century man. They are all, to use Goethe's phrase, ultra, beyond, or "ecstatic." They do not represent a human cosmos in their works, but fragments of an uncertain frame of reference. Perhaps one could say that modernity begins with the dissolution of a natural and social order in which man was supposed to have a definite nature and place, while modern man "exists", displaced and out of place, in extreme situations on the edge of chaos. Present-day modernity is therefore vastly different from what was debated under this title in the seventeenth century with regard to the relative merits of the "moderns and ancients." The comparison with the ancient classics was a comparison with works of the same kind. Milton, for example, was compared with Virgil, Corneille with Sophocles. Our modernity, which came of age with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, is not comparable with what has gone before because it has changed the very standards of comparison.<sup>15</sup>

Philosophers are conspicuously absent from Löwith's account of when the indubitably modern took its rise. But certainly our question in reverse gear pushes us back to the powerfully formative figure of G. W. F. Hegel. Regarding him, Langdon Gilkey indulges in high praise, which he elsewhere drastically qualifies.

Hegel, more than any other thinker, can rightly be called the father of modernity. No previous thinker rejected so powerfully the oppressive and life-draining power of any transcendent [Being] over against man, the glory and in fact divinity of the unfolding of an unlimited human autonomy as the goal of human history, and the need therefore to think out reality in terms not only deity but also of immanence and autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

But Gilkey, after identifying Hegel as proper claimant to the title of the father of Western thought, does not call off the quest for the *fons er origo* of modernity. He continues on back to the eighteenth century Scottish skeptic, David Hume, endorsing the characterization which Peter Gay makes in "his remarkable book", *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*.

Hume, therefore, more decisively than many of his brethren in the Enlightenment, stands at the threshold of modernity and exhibits its risks and its possibilities. Without melodrama but the sober eloquence one would expect from an accomplished classicist, Hume makes plain that since God is silent, man is his own master; he must live in a disenchanting world, submit everything to criticism, and make his own way.<sup>17</sup>

Hume, however, was just one of that large company of gifted *illuminati* and *philosophers* who stand "at the threshold of modernity." These are emancipated intellectuals who took upon themselves the responsibility of freeing their peers and their posterity from the bondage of Christian supernaturalism. Fervent apostles of the secular faith engendered by the *Novum Organum* of Francis Bacon and the mathematical rationalism of René Descartes, they proposed a new religion of this-worldly humanism to replace the old religion of authoritarian revelation. As Becker wrote, these were the four major tenets of their creed:

(1) Man is not natively depraved; (2) the end of life is life itself, the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death; (3) man is capable, guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth; and (4) the first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from