

the testing of God's children. In God's appointed time, the Earthly City would come to an end and the earth itself swallowed up in flames. On that last day good and evil men would be finally separated. For the recalcitrant there was reserved a place of everlasting punishment; but the faithful would be gathered with God in the Heavenly City, there in perfection and felicity to dwell forever.³

Becker thus insists that the climate of opinion which prevails today is a *milieu* or a *Zeitgeist* which renders biblical supernaturalism a dead-option. How valid, though, is the assumption which leads to his pronouncement? Is the modern mind, subsisting in its own climate of opinion, unable to accept the biblical view of reality even with "the best will in the world"?

The Modern Mind: How Valid a Concept?

Before that question can be adequately answered, a prior issue requires adjudication. Is the concept of a modern mind, sharply distinguishable from an ancient mind or a medieval mind, anything more than a linguistic convenience which can be used only if its fluidity, imprecision, and indefiniteness are fully recognized? Is it merely a semantic device of dubious value or is it a classificatory rubric which isolates a distinctive entity like the Japanese current that slowly takes on its own unambiguous qualities as it flows through the Pacific Ocean? In the sea of time, similarly, does a current of thought, a cluster of interlocking ideas, a sort of unconscious ideology, gain distinctiveness and directionality until it requires a separate categorization?

But this issue drives us back to an even more basic dispute. Does man *qua* man have a given nature and hence a mind which in all periods of history is uniquely human? There are those philosophers -- Jean Paul Sartre, for example -- who deny that man has a nature which is given, fixed, uniquely human. Since they hold that existence precedes essence, they hold, too, that man in freedom defines himself, and every man's self-definition is irreducibly idiosyncratic. They therefore resist all attempt to make generalizations, other than biological, about persons.

There are other philosophers, however, who draw from the work of anthropologists and psychologists the conclusion that, while born with a uniquely human nature, man unlike instinct-driven and unreflective creatures has a malleable nature which undergoes remarkably diverse modifications according to the environmental and cultural influences that bear upon it. Yet, regardless of the astonishingly wide spectrum of human societies, man's mind as an integral element of his nature is nevertheless always and everywhere the mind of man. Human beings, whether primitive or civilized, oriental and western, ancient and modern, carry on mental processes that are, if not identical, more similar than dissimilar. So French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl once argued that among primitives a prelogical mentality is to be found (*mentalité prelogique*) which ignores, supposedly, the principles of identity and contradiction. Later, however, he repudiated this position, acknowledging that primitive savages and Parisian savants have in common a human mind. William Foxwell Albright explains why: