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## Titanism in the West

[Christ] became man so that we might become God.

—Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* (54.3)

To be man means to reach toward being God.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Learn to live and to die, and in order to be a man, refuse to be God.

—Dr. Rieux, Albert Camus, *The Plague*

O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.

—Pindar

### Introduction

In American culture *humanism* has not been a term widely used until the 1980s, when the Religious Right began to employ it to excrete everything that it is against. It used to be that all of America's ills were blamed on a "Communist conspiracy," but now this has been replaced with a "humanist" conspiracy. Humanists are being targeted as the one source of every evil, from homosexuality to one-world government. This attack is truly incredible if one considers the fact that humanism is one of the greatest achievements of Western civilization. The humanism of Socrates has become the basis for ethical individualism; the humanism of the Greek Sophists gave law its adversarial system and inspired Renaissance humanists to extend education to the masses as well as to the aristocracy; the Christian humanism of Aquinas and Erasmus helped temper negative views of human nature found in the biblical tradition; and the humanism of

the Enlightenment gave us political rights, representative government, and free market economics.

Most of the distortion of the humanist tradition has come from the Religious Right, but equal blame must go to some secular humanists who insist that only their views are “true” humanism. These humanists, fundamentalists, and too many knowledgeable Christians continue to believe that all humanists are atheists. Humanists are most often described as those who attempt to move God aside and to take God’s place; in other words, the Religious Right conceives of all humanists as Titans. Such a view simply does an injustice to the Western humanist tradition, which, since Plato and Aristotle, has been dominated by confirmed theists and moderate humanists. Secular humanism has its origins in Protagoras and in his belief that human beings are the measure of all things. This was definitely a minority tradition until the Enlightenment, but even then theistic humanists like the American Founding Fathers still prevailed. It has only been during the last two centuries that secular humanism has made any progress, culminating in our time with atheistic existentialism and other secular philosophies.

### **Humanism and Superhumanism**

Western humanism can be defined as the view that holds that all human beings have intrinsic value and dignity. Humanists believe that human beings are individual centers of value with moral freedom and responsibility. Western humanists also trust reason rather than revelation as a guide to truth, but they must realize that even their own principles cannot be strictly demonstrated as true. The limited scope of human reason does allow theistic humanists to appeal to divine revelation, but only if these revealed truths do not undermine basic humanist principles. For example, Calvin and Luther’s rejection of reason (particularly Luther’s), their belief in utter human depravity, and their affirmation of total divine determinism definitely remove them from the humanist camp. While humanists in Europe and Asia differ on the exact nature of human freedom (see chapter 8), a basic humanist assumption will be the belief that human beings play a principal role in shaping their own destinies.

If properly conceived, humanism does not involve the displacement of God in favor of humankind. True theistic humanism will let God be God and humans be humans. This is what could be called the “Hebraic principle,” based on the greatest discovery of the ancient

Hebrews, namely, the transcendence of God. The Hebrew writers of the sixth century B.C.E. not only overcame the primitive anthropomorphisms of earlier writers, but also made a clean break with Mesopotamian views in which, for example, gods battled with sea dragons or mated with humans. This of course thoroughly confused the distinction between the divine and the nondivine.

Confucianism and Buddhism are the only Asian philosophies that have been called humanisms. (See chapter 8 for more on Buddhist humanism.) Confucius' strong focus on human dignity and right human relationships and on the deemphasis on divine powers establish his humanist credentials. Confucian humanism can be summarized best by a passage from the *Analects*: "It is humans that make the Way great and not the Way that can make humans great."<sup>1</sup> Confucius also respects the Hebraic principle by refusing to humanize Heaven and rejecting the divinization of human beings. This will be the main topic of chapters 9 and 10.

We must be careful in formulating a general definition of humanism that will encompass both Asia and Euro-America. The humanism of the Greeks and the Chinese focuses on this-worldly concerns without giving up the idea of a transcendent realm altogether. In other words, humanism's principal concerns in Greece and China were secular. Both the Greeks (especially after Socrates) and Confucians turned from cosmology and metaphysics to what they considered to be the more pressing concerns of ethics and politics. The crucial agenda for both Socrates and Confucius was to establish proper human relationships. Most Indian thought can hardly be described as secular philosophy; therefore, the common worldly concerns we find in Western and Chinese humanism cannot be the baseline of a comprehensive view of humanism. The emphasis here is more on speculative metaphysics and cosmology, and this contrasts sharply with the humanism of Socrates, the Sophists, and modern existentialists.

As for a comprehensive definition of humanism, the entry from *Websters Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* serves our purposes very well: "A doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values, especially a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." The Indian ascetic tradition, by virtue of its focus on humanity and its de-emphasis on the role of the gods, fits this broad definition of humanism. In the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions human beings realize themselves through spiritual discipline (*tapas*), not through reason. Reason also plays a more sub-

ordinate role in Confucianism. Whereas for Aristotle “reason more than anything else is man,”<sup>2</sup> for Confucius true humanity (*ren*) consists in reciprocity and in loving others. Even with the Buddha’s great dialectical skills, it is clear that the lay Buddhist is never liberated by reason but by virtuous action. Therefore, for both Confucianism and for some forms of Buddhism substituting “self-realization through virtue” for reason would serve to make this definition of humanism more universal.

The Greek Protagoras could be called the father of secular humanism in Europe. His *homo mensura* thesis becomes the basis for the extreme humanism of Titanism. Secular humanism need not be Titanistic if it remains within the bounds of human limitations. But when we find that humans are the measure of everything in the universe, then we have encountered the radical anthropomorphism and superhumanism that gives rise to Titanism. In the *Māndūkya Upaniṣad*, the human mouth becomes an analogue for basic cosmic sounds, and the yogi who reaches the third stage of “deep sleep” is able to “measure the whole universe in very deed and is absorbed (into it).”<sup>3</sup> In Western humanism the Titans celebrate their radical autonomy and control over their destinies; likewise, the yogi “attains to independent sovereignty, attains to the lord of the mind.”<sup>4</sup> In the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* the liberated one is even beyond good and evil,<sup>5</sup> a point that Karl Potter emphasized in an earlier discussion.

Extreme humanism in Asia and Europe does converge on one pervasive cosmological image: parts of the natural world are analogized as parts of the human body. One widespread expression of this is the idea that human beings are microcosms of the macrocosm. The Church Father Origen said that “you are another world in miniature and in you are the sun, the moon, and also the stars.”<sup>6</sup> The Renaissance humanist Robert Grosseteste, in a small piece called “Man Is a Smaller World,” suggests that the “head refers to the heavens: in it are the two eyes, like the lights of the sun and moon. The breast corresponds to the air . . . but the belly is likened to the sea . . . [and] the soles of the feet are likened to the earth.”<sup>7</sup> The Swedish mystic Immanuel Swedenborg continues this same tradition: “The multitude of these little glands [of the brain] may also be compared to the multitude of angelic societies. . . .” But he also reproduces the Indian cosmotheandric view: “The whole of heaven has this resemblance to man, because God is a Man.”<sup>8</sup> This is the ultimate goal of spiritual Titanism: to become God in God’s absence or to dethrone the gods and to humanize the entire universe.

### Existentialism and Titanism

The existentialist writers offer some of the best examples of Western Titanism. Feodor Dostoevsky's notorious protagonists are the most dramatic expression of this extremes humanism. First, we have Raskolnikov, the existentialist hero of *Crime and Punishment*, who after convincing himself that there is no reason why one should follow moral conventions, attempts to execute the perfect crime. Dostoevsky, simultaneously sympathetic and horrified at his own Titans, chronicles in painful detail the downfall of a man who thinks he can transcend the basic human predicament. The Ivan of *Brothers Karamazov* is also a Titan in his celebration of the death of God and in his famous declaration that if God does not exist then everything is possible. Late in the novel Satan appears to Ivan in a dream to foretell the coming of a man-god who will take God's place when all religious belief is destroyed.

It is with Kirilov of *The Devils* (sometimes entitled *The Possessed*) that the theme of the man-god is played out in some detail. Kirilov is part of a ragtag group of revolutionaries who are planning terrorist actions against the government, and his part in the plan is a prearranged suicide. He has already shown himself to be erratic and unreliable, and he finally explains himself to Stravrogin, one of the conspirators. Kirilov says that he believes that all things and acts are good, and the carrier of this message (obviously Kirilov himself) will be called the "man-god." Stravrogin is confused, for he believes that Kirilov must mean Jesus Christ. He reminds Kirilov that this man who said that all is good (Dostoevsky's oddly unbiblical view of Jesus) was crucified. Furthermore, protests Stravrogin, Jesus was the God-man not a man-god, which he, Kirilov, will become. This is the Western equivalent of the distinction between Avatāravāda and Uttarāvāda that was discussed in the introduction.

Later in the book Kirilov and another conspirator discuss the same subject. Kirilov argues, just like Ivan Karamazov, that theoretically God must exist, but an all-powerful deity would cause all evil and suffering. Such a God would also undermine human freedom, so he has to reject God. But there is even more to Kirilov's Titanistic logic: he now has to kill himself, not for the revolutionary cause, but to bring about the age of the man-god. The crux of Kirilov's argument is the following: "If there is a God, then it is always His will, and I can do nothing against His will. If there isn't, then it is my will, and I am bound to express my self-will . . . [and] the most

important point of my self-will is to kill myself.”<sup>9</sup> Kirilov believes that his unique suicide will convince all other persons of their own self-will and of their basic potential as the new gods. “I am the only man in universal history who for the first time refused to invent God. Let them know it once for all.”<sup>10</sup> Kirilov is the self-proclaimed prophet of a new race of spiritual Titans.

Jean-Paul Sartre continues the existentialism of Dostoevsky’s Titans, and the best Sartrean parallel to Kirilov is Orestes in *The Flies*. Taking many liberties with Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sartre places Orestes in a Promethean rebellion against Zeus, who is presented as an unflattering mixture of Olympian deity, Yahweh, magician, and fool. Like Kirilov, Orestes also wants to sacrifice himself—Christ-like (but much superior to that failure Jesus, says Kirilov)—so that the human race can be free from both earthly and heavenly tyrants. Both Zeus and Aegistheus must realize that their game is up: “The bane of gods and kings. The bitterness of knowing men are free . . . [and] once freedom lights its beacon in a man’s heart, the gods are powerless against him.”<sup>11</sup> The impotence of the gods is a theme that will become dominant in Indian Titanism.

Both Kirilov and Orestes celebrate their dreadful freedom; neither of them feel self-pity or remorse; both of them execute actions, which, by virtue of having been freely chosen, are necessarily good; and both have cut themselves off from God’s nature and from nature’s laws. Both claim to be completely autonomous, guided by their own self-will and by their own laws. Neither of them, however, shuns responsibility, for as Orestes states: “You see me, men of Argos, you understand that my crime is wholly mine; I claim it as my own, for all to know; it is my glory, my life’s work, and you can neither punish me nor pity me.”<sup>12</sup> At this point it must be observed that the Indian Titans never transcend the law of karma (they simply fulfill it completely); therefore, Western Titanism is much more extreme with respect to natural moral law. But Indian Titans, as Karl Potter observed above, are more extreme in their view that nature can be transcended completely.

Sartre’s manifesto *Existentialism Is a Humanism* gives the philosophical basis for his Titanism. First, his humanism is extreme: he declares that “we are on a plane where there are only men” and “there is no non-human situation.”<sup>13</sup> With nature out of the way, Sartre turns to God. His Promethean challenge is that “the fundamental project of human reality is that man is the being whose project is to be God.”<sup>14</sup> The violation of the Hebraic principle is complete: human beings are exhorted to take over divine prerogatives and divine at-

tributes. Sartre claims that “each of us performs an absolute act in breathing, eating, sleeping, or behaving in any way whatever. There is no difference between being free, . . . an existence which chooses its essence, and being absolute.”<sup>15</sup> Traditional theologians have observed that if the will is free, then divine and human wills would be formally equal. A will admits of no degrees: either one has one or not. At the same time, these theologians also conclude that our finitude and relative impotence mean that we obviously cannot do what God can do with unlimited power. Only Titans believe that we somehow have the power to challenge the gods and to dominate the universe.

### **Christian Titanism and the Incarnation**

Direct empirical investigation of the self would never have produced the idea of an autonomous self; indeed, experience shows that the self, embedded as it is in a body and social relations, is anything but self-contained, self-sufficient, and completely self-directing. Therefore, the autonomous self must have been a theoretical invention. Mark C. Taylor proposes that the idea of the autonomous self is basically a theological conception.<sup>16</sup> Catherine Keller agrees with Taylor in her succinct observation that “the atomic ego is created in the image of the separate God.”<sup>17</sup> In Christian philosophy and theology the ideal self is modeled on the concept of God as a self-contained, self-sufficient being of pure thought. For example, in his argument for free will, Thomas Aquinas essentially makes the human will an unmoved mover. The following passage is especially revealing:

The closer an object of nature is to God, the greater in it can be found an expression of a semblance of divine dignity. It is furthermore a matter of divine dignity to move, influence, direct all things and be moved, influenced, and directed by no other thing. Hence, the closer a natural object is to God the less it is directed by an other and the more it is capable of directing itself.<sup>18</sup>

In his moral rationalism Kant presents the same view of the self, but with significant changes. The effect of Kant’s reduction of religion to morality is that the transcendent reality of God is replaced by conscience, which is to be interpreted as a source of divine commands. One possible interpretation leads to a humanism of radical proportions: autonomous reason, an unmoved mover, takes over divine pre-

rogatives. In short, there is for Kant a little god, or Titan, in each one of us. Kant's moral rationalism can be seen as the fulfillment of Aristotle's belief that "reason is divine" and that "life according to it is divine in comparison with human life."<sup>19</sup>

Thinkers with any respect for logic must strongly disagree with Sartre's contention that "there is no difference between being an absolute, temporally localized" and being God.<sup>20</sup> Sartre is obviously contradicting himself: an absolute cannot be temporally localized. Even if there were no God, this does not mean that we can take on divine attributes. But if God exists, then the logic of divinity requires that we acknowledge an ontological difference between Creator and creature, between a necessary, infinite being and contingent, finite beings. This is the thrust of the Hebraic principle in the Judeo-Christian (as well as in the Zoroastrian and Islamic) tradition. Jewish and Christian thinkers might, therefore, contend that the lesson of the Garden, the moral of the story of Job, and other examples of God's sovereign control offer the best defense against Titanism.

Even though the Bible warns against extreme humanism—even, some might say, humanism in any form—this does not mean that those who interpret biblical teachings were immune from Titanism. In fact, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was only the Sadducees who strictly adhered to the Hebraic principle. Along with the Pharisees, the Sadducees rejected the Christian idea of Incarnation (to them a pagan mixing of human and divine), but the Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, also eschewed the resurrection of the body and eternal life. In addition to rejecting any idea of incarnation (the humanization of God), a truly Hebraic theology must also avoid any divinization of humans by granting them the divine attribute of immortality. Both concepts involve a clear violation of the Hebraic principle. In rejecting an immortal soul, the Sadducees were being loyal to a preexilic Hebrew tradition that the human soul was thoroughly mortal and corruptible. Furthermore, references to bodily resurrection and to eternal life, except for a few obscure passages in the Psalms, do not appear until after the Babylonian captivity. For the preexilic Hebrews, all human beings, regardless of virtue or vice, went to Sheol, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek Hades. Walter Brueggemann finds the strongest biblical humanism in the Wisdom literature.<sup>21</sup> Here Brueggemann discovers a reaffirmation of the preexilic belief that "being human is all there is" as contrasted with the orthodox doctrine that "being human is just a stage" in our goal of becoming angels or gods.

At this point the intimate relationship between the two major violations of the Hebraic principle—our own divinization and the humanization of God—becomes clear. In his *De Incarnatione Athana-*



sus proclaimed that the Logos “became man so that we might become God.”<sup>22</sup> This is not just an erratic comment on Athanasius’ part, because we can read in Thomist Etienne Gilson that “by the grace of the Incarnation, which made human nature divine, we can have friendship with God because we can live with Him.”<sup>23</sup> Drawing on Kirilov’s point that the God-man is not the same as the man-god, some might claim that the doctrine of Incarnation is a sort of “reverse” Titanism. (There is some truth in this contention, and that will be discussed at the end of this section.) Incarnational theologies might be yet another Promethean way to humble and to humiliate God—to manipulate God for our own project of divinization. (The subordination of God is particularly evident in the concept of *kenōsis*, in which God empties himself and takes on “the form of a servant.”)<sup>24</sup> The humanization of God through incarnation could be just another example of the vanity of our species. It becomes a vindication of Xenophanes dictum that all creatures make gods in their own image.

The English debate on the Incarnation in the late 1970s offers some evidence for this hypothesis. Michael Green, editor of *The Truth of God Incarnate* and leading critic of the liberals of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, quotes Michael Ramsey favorably: “God is Christ-like, and in him is no un-Christ-likeness at all.”<sup>25</sup> “Christ” is the New Testament equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah,” which was originally the name for the future warrior-king who would destroy the enemies of Israel and set up God’s kingdom on earth. Although Messiah meant much more than this for most early Christians, it is nonetheless significant that contemporary evangelical Christians choose to characterize the *entire* nature of God in terms of this human concept.

When Green demands a “revelation of [God] that necessarily corresponds to this real nature,”<sup>26</sup> he is essentially saying that God’s real nature is somehow basically human. Confirming my point about Xenophanes, Green argues that “God deign[ed] to show me what he was like in terms I could understand, the terms of a human life.”<sup>27</sup> Joining Green against the liberals in the incarnation debate, Brian Hebblethwaite argues against John Hick’s idea of multiple worldwide incarnations: “For only one man can actually be God to us, if God himself is one. . . . And the Son, we discover, is very God of very God, God’s human face, reflecting God’s own glory, and bearing the stamp of his nature.”<sup>28</sup> Are these conservative evangelical Christians implicitly agreeing with Vivekananda that it is legitimate to “evolve God out of man”?

Among the liberals it is Don Cupitt who best unveils the profound mistakes of the literal incarnationists. Significantly, it is Cupitt who best expresses the Hebraic principle in *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

Cupitt contends that a literal incarnation made it easy for the Church to substitute a worship of Christ for the worship of God. This development was subtle, but deeply rooted, and broke through dramatically in the Christocentrism of the Reformation. As Cupitt states:

Perhaps it was only when Christocentric religion finally toppled over into the absurdity of “Christian Atheism” that some Christians began to realize that Feuerbach [and Xenophanes] might have been right after all; Chalcedonian Christology could be a remote ancestor of modern unbelief, by beginning the process of shifting the focus of devotion from God to man . . . [Chalcedon led to] a cult of humanity. Similarly, it could not resist the giving of the title *theotokos*, Mother of God, to Mary. The phrase “Mother of God” is *prima facie* blasphemous.<sup>29</sup>

This is yet another aspect of the Christian project of humanizing God.

While American fundamentalists agree with these English evangelicals about a literal Incarnation, they violate the Hebraic principle in another way. Many in the Religious Right preempt God’s role in the universe by making judgments for God. The most famous example of this, of course, is Jerry Falwell’s claim that God does not answer the prayers of Jews. More general, however, is the tendency for fundamentalists to identify who the real Christians are—usually themselves. In his incisive *Religious Right and Christian Faith*, Gabriel Fackre charges that fundamentalists who attempt to attain God’s goals through political means are actually embracing a humanist ideology. Insofar as fundamentalists are attempting to do God’s work for him in the world, they are just as humanist as the secularists they have railed against. Not unlike the ancient Gnostics, the fundamentalists claim infallible knowledge in all things spiritual. This claim is obviously an expression of Gnostic Titanism, and combined with the gnostic axiom of biblical inerrancy, it allows fundamentalists to profess to know what God exactly said and what God actually wants us to do.

In the evangelical rationalism of Ronald H. Nash and Gordon H. Clark, who resurrect the Logos doctrine of the early Church Fathers, we find the claim that, insofar as the divine Logos is in the human *imago dei*, we are able to think God’s thoughts after him.<sup>30</sup> Especially striking is the following motto by Stuart C. Hackett, another evangelical rationalist: “I think, Therefore God is.”<sup>31</sup> Titanistic elements in fundamentalism also appear among the creationists, who presume to know, for example, that the search for extraterrestrial life is un-

necessary because they already know for sure that earthly life was the only life that God planned for cosmic history.<sup>32</sup>

Before ending this section, we have to qualify, in a significant way, the elements of Titanism that we have discovered in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Religions of obedience stress “other-power” in their belief in a transcendent, omnipotent God as sovereign ruler of the universe, while gnostic religions focus on “self-power” and explicitly subordinate the role of the gods. In religions of obedience, God saves us, but in religions of knowledge we save ourselves. A major exception in the Asian tradition is Pure Land Buddhism. Shinran (1173–1262), Buddhism’s Luther, radicalized a tradition that had already placed emphasis on human depravity and reliance on “other-power” rather than on “self-power.”<sup>33</sup>

Even though orthodox Christianity promises eternal life, it is clear (despite theologians like Hackett who hold to a “natural” immortality)<sup>34</sup> that the correct teaching should be a “bestowed” immortality. (Recall that Adam and Eve ate only from the “knowledge” tree, and Yahweh removed them before they could eat of the Tree of Life.) According to Christian doctrine, it takes a special act of God to restore the tarnished *imago dei* and to transform the mortal soul into something fit for the divine presence. Gilson made this point clear: God’s grace makes “human nature divine.”<sup>35</sup> By contrast immortality in Hinduism and Jainism is “natural,” an essential attribute of the human soul. Therefore, the Titanistic elements of Christianity are mitigated by the fact that the Hebraic principle, while substantially compromised by the Incarnation, human immortality, and some gnostic elements, is still intact. In short, God is still in control and still makes the final decisions. (Recall that the yogi can “roll up space as it were a piece of leather,” but only Yahweh can “roll up the skies like a scroll.”)<sup>36</sup> Therefore, there is no extreme humanism in Christianity (unless one agrees completely with Cupitt’s analysis of the Incarnation), but it is found in Hinduism, Jainism, and existentialism. The yogi discovers his own divinity, Kirilov tries valiantly to make himself God, but the Christian God bestows immortality by means of divine grace and our obedience.

### **Western Answers to Titanism**

It is clear that theistic humanists must have a better theological model than that of divine master-obedient servant. Kant was entirely correct when he observed that the practice of religious subservience is nothing but an extension of our ancestors’ “courtly

obligations” to kings and emperors. But human beings have come of age: they have thrown off authoritarian governments and they now must reject all authoritarian forms of religion as well. Theistic humanism, therefore, must join the gnostic religions, but it must beware of the dangers of Titanism. In eschatology and ethics this means that the humanist must reject God as cosmic moralist and final judge. Among the current options in Protestant liberalism, the process theologians are correct in their rejection of God as a cosmic moralist,<sup>37</sup> and their denial of divine omnicausality and divine foreknowledge offers the best protection for human freedom.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, their organic view of reality and their relational view of the self allow humanists to avoid the alienation caused by the absolute autonomy claimed in Sartrean existentialism. Furthermore, the process theists propose an intelligible theory of divine immanence that tempers the extremes of the *via negativa* and its overemphasis on divine transcendence. (There are dangers in applying the Hebraic principle too strictly and thereby making any relation between God and the world impossible.) Finally, the process theists, particularly David R. Griffin, have proposed a “constructive postmodernism,” which offers a middle way between the liabilities of both premodern and deconstructive views. This particular postmodern vision will be the principal theoretical framework for this book. Constructive postmodernism can also be found in the “dialogical” existentialists whom I will discuss presently.

One of the trademarks of humanist philosophers, especially under the influence of Kant, has been the use of the term *autonomy*. The word comes from the Greek words *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law), so that an autonomous person is a self-governing being. In many minds the idea of autonomy conjures up visions of isolated individuals vying for dominance over nature and over their fellow human beings. It gives the mistaken impression that people can and should be able to live without each other’s support. Emphasis on autonomy seems to preclude any real basis for human community and social interaction. The possibility of moral and political anarchism created by self-legislating individuals, attested to by Dostoevsky and Sartre’s heroes, is something that contemporary humanists must guard against.

One of the best critiques of autonomy is found in Gabriel Marcel’s *Being and Having*, a crucial text for what could be called dialogical existentialism. The concept of self-sufficient, self-contained, self-governing individuals, just like the idea of the material atom, comes from “first reflection” and from the “realm of having,” a “zone of separa-

tion.” (It is no accident that a move to a relational self and to a more holistic social philosophy has gone hand-in-hand with a move to relational entities and to an “organic” universe in contemporary physics.) Marcel observes that the motto of the autonomous person is “I want to run my own life,” which then leads to defensive and protective maneuvers that all come under the rubric of “Don’t tread on me.” For Marcel true freedom is not based on autonomy, but on a relational self that is fully engaged with other people and with the world. True freedom is “rooted in Being,” not having, and “transcends all possible possession. . . .”<sup>39</sup> That means, for example, that “we *are* our bodies” instead of “we *own* our bodies,” as many contemporary feminists and libertarians are prone to say. The former view is one that we will also find in Confucianism and in many Buddhist schools.

If we take Marcel seriously, then all language about us “owning” ourselves (some humanists) or God “owning” us (fundamentalism) must be given up. A campus poster once announced a talk, sponsored by the Campus Crusade for Christ, entitled “Whose am I?” This was obviously a fundamentalist response to the humanistic question of “Who am I?” and in turn a derivation of the Socratic “Know thyself.” It is distressing to discover that John Locke, a great humanist in all other respects, supports the fundamentalist view: “As a work of God, [man] remains always not only God’s servant but forever God’s property.”<sup>40</sup>

In their introduction to process theology, John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin praise the existentialists for their contributions to our understanding of human nature. I believe that this praise ought to be more discriminatory in light of the Titanism that we have discovered in the “monological” existentialists—Dostoevsky’s heroes and Sartre. The key to dialogical existentialism (Heidegger, Marcel, Buber, and Merleau-Ponty) is an explicit critique of a Cartesian methodology which, from the beginning, perpetuates an alienating gap between the self and the world. Descartes’s method of systematic doubt leads to the isolated *ego cogito* and then to the problem of this ego’s relationship to the world. Descartes solves this problem positively with a confident flourish of arguments for the existence of God and for the external world.

The “monological” existentialists, rejecting these arguments for God but retaining the Cartesian starting point, leave us at the nadir of doubt with at best a paradoxical idea of God (Kierkegaard) or at worst a thoroughgoing atheism and solipsism (Sartre). Using the advantages of the literary medium, these thinkers are only dramatically expressing what many academic philosophers have thought for

a long time: that the inevitable result of the Cartesian method is solipsism and skepticism. Sartre's Cartesian starting point is perfectly clear in his manifesto *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. He states confidently: "Subjectivity of the individual is indeed our point of departure, and this for strictly philosophic reasons. . . . There can be no other truth to take off from than this: *I think; therefore, I exist*. There we have the absolute truth of consciousness becoming aware of itself."<sup>41</sup>

Marcel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Buber explicitly reject this Cartesian starting point, and Marcel suggests that philosophy must move from "intrasubjectivity" to "intersubjectivity"—hence, the two types of existentialism: monological and dialogical. Sartre does in fact use the term "intersubjectivity," but his way of explaining it is not dialogical: "This is the [intersubjective] world in which man decides what he is and what others are."<sup>42</sup> Although in the preceding discussion Sartre appears to understand the implications of a legitimate dialogical view (e.g., "he perceives them as the condition of his own existence"), the conclusion just quoted indicates that he does not leave his Cartesian isolation and his radical humanist notion of total self-determination. In a famous 1970 interview, Sartre confesses that he had finally learned the "power of circumstance," and that although he had used Heidegger's concept of "Being-in-the-world" in *Being and Nothingness*, he had not realized that this was incompatible with radical subjectivity and freedom.<sup>43</sup>

Although Albert Camus maintained a Cartesian methodology and preserved a Sartrean dualism of consciousness and the world, he nonetheless recognized the meaning of limits and always knew the dangers of Titanism. Camus's comment that we must imagine "God without human immortality" shows that he has a full understanding of the Hebraic principle.<sup>44</sup> Camus also criticizes spiritual Titanism in his concept of "philosophical suicide," the heroic attempt to transcend basic human limitations. In his 1970 interview Sartre admitted that he had once been captured by the "myth of the hero." Camus, therefore, deliberately creates an antihero as a substitute for the Titans—Ivan, Raskolnikov, Kirilov, and Abraham—of earlier existentialist literature. Instead of Prometheus and Sartre's Orestes, Camus offers us Sisyphus, "proletarian of the gods," who instead of battling Zeus and protesting his punishment, accepts the lesson not learned by extreme humanists: "The wholly human origin of all that is human."<sup>45</sup> One of Camus's strongest comments against Titanism is the following: "By what is an odd inconsistency in such an alert race, the Greeks claimed that those who died young were beloved of the

gods. And that is true only if you are willing to believe that entering the ridiculous world of the gods is forever losing the purest of which is feeling, and feeling on this earth."<sup>46</sup>

Dostoevsky also knows that we have to be true to the earth. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov's Titanism is countered by the childlike innocence and acceptance of Sonya, who, after hearing Raskolnikov's confession, tells him to go to the "Four Corners" and to kiss "Mother Earth." Dostoevsky realizes, as Nietzsche did, that extreme humanism is ultimately destructive of every human value. Late in the novel Raskolnikov has a dream, which Dostoevsky obviously designed as a warning:

He had dreamt in his illness that the whole world was condemned to fall victim to a terrible, unknown pestilence which was moving on Europe out of the depths of Asia. All were destined to perish, except a chosen few, a very few. . . . People who were infected immediately became like men possessed and out of their minds. But never, never, had any men thought themselves so wise and so unshakable in the truth as those who were attacked. Never had they considered their judgments, their scientific deductions, or their moral convictions and creeds more infallible. Whole communities, whole cities and nations, were infected and went mad. All were full of anxiety, and none could understand any other; each thought he was the sole repository of truth and was tormented when he looked at the others, beat his breast, wrung his hands, and wept. They did not know how or whom to judge and could not agree what was evil and what good. They did not know whom to condemn or whom to acquit. Men killed one another in senseless rage. . . . In the whole world only a few could save themselves, a chosen handful of the pure, who were destined to found a new race of men and a new life, and to renew and cleanse the earth; but nobody had ever seen them anywhere, nobody had heard their voices or their words.<sup>47</sup>

This nihilistic vision represents Dostoevsky's acute perceptions of the dangers of modernism. His diagnosis is, in short, that modernism leads to Titanism, both spiritual and technological. (It is indeed incongruous that madmen making scientific deductions come out of Asia, but it is consistent with Indian yogis who claim to be beyond good and evil.) Dostoevsky's answer, much like Solzhenitsyn's, is a

call for a return to Mother Earth, Mother Russia, and the Russian Orthodox Church—a decidedly premodern solution to modernism’s radical individualism and alienation. Keeping the dialogical existentialists and process theists in mind and drawing on Hebrew and Buddhist sources, we will now turn to a consideration of some postmodern solutions.