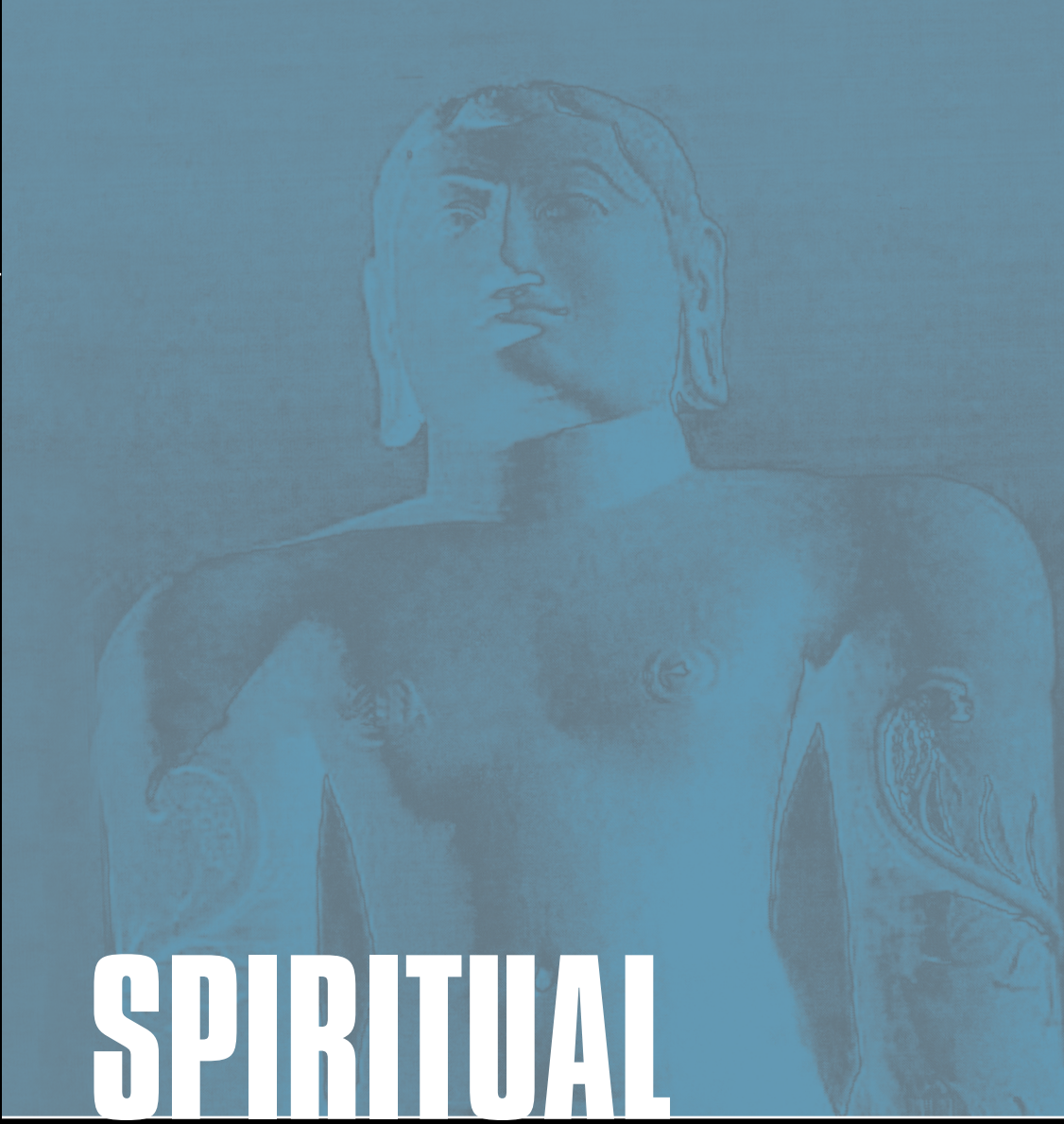

# SPIRITUAL TITANISM

Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives

Nicholas F. Gier

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# Spiritual Titanism

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# SPIRITUAL TITANISM

*Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives*

*Nicholas F. Gier*

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*To my father and mother*
*In loving memory*

The majestic aloofness of the perfected, balanced, absolutely self-contained figure of the [Jaina] saint becomes emphasized in its triumphant isolation. The image of the released one seems to be neither animate nor inanimate, but pervaded by a strange and timeless calm. It is human in shape and feature, yet as inhuman as an icicle; . . . [the saint] stands supernally motionless, absolutely unconcerned about the worshipping, jubilant crowds that throng around his feet.

Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*

# Contents

# Preface

> What matters most for India is not so much the salvation of the personality as the acquisition of absolute freedom.
>
> —Mircea Eliade[1]

> In the millennium to come we are meant to become Gods on other planets. This is the great potential of our Divinity.
>
> —Gopi Krishna[2]

> The whole ascetic tradition . . . springs from that most polluted of all sources, the Satanic sin of pride, the desire to be "like gods." We are not gods, we are social irrational animals, designed to become rational, social animals. . . .
>
> —R. C. Zaehner[3]

The idea for this book arose out of an insight I had about the use of the term *humanism* by the Religious Right. The typical conservative Christian describes a humanist as one who attempts to move God aside and to take God's place. For such a Christian, humanism is Titanism, a worldview in which human beings take on divine attributes and divine prerogatives. (The Religious Right is especially keen on maintaining God's right to set the laws of human conduct.) As I show in chapter 1, some existentialists express a form of Titanism, but the Religious Right's blanket condemnation does a gross injustice to more moderate forms of humanism, which include Christian humanists as diverse as Aquinas, Erasmus, the American Founding Fathers, and C. S. Lewis.[4] Over the twenty-five years that I have taught Indian philosophy and religion, I have been struck by

the number of texts that contain a form of spiritual Titanism, in many ways more extreme than Western Titanism. Whereas the latter humanist rarely, if ever, claims that humans have divine attributes, this *is* the basic view of human nature in Jainism, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and later Hindu texts.

The spiritual Titanism of India as been obscured by what some have called affirmative Orientalism, a response to the "negative Orientalism" that arose out of the first Western encounters with Indian culture. Negative Orientalism viewed the Indian as an uncivilized, irrational, superstitious, lazy, cowardly, and effeminate man. Edward Said has defined Orientalism as a "Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[5] He sees it as a form of cultural and political Titanism, an expression of the will to power over Asia. Orientalism promoted an invisible combination of cultural and technological knowledge as power. It is, according to Said, a "political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness."[6] The Orient then became an idea, a representation, an alien Other.

While granting the technological advantage of Western culture, Anne Besant and the theosophists promoted affirmative Orientalism, a view that proclaimed the spiritual superiority of Indian civilization and the nobility of its commitment to the virtues of passivity, nonviolence, and compassion. (Ironically, Gandhi learned to appreciate the value of his own Indian tradition from his association with theosophists in London.) Affirmative Orientalism is still very strong today and Indian philosophy and religion are still viewed by many as the answer to the ills and deficiencies of modern society. A great many Indian scholars, far more sophisticated than Besant, remain committed to the view that their own monistic metaphysics is the proper response to the anthropocentric philosophies of the West.[7] This book will remind readers that some Indian philosophies are dualistic (even Manichean) and that some are even more human-centered than Western humanism.

I submit that affirmative Orientalism is just as guilty of making the Indian an alien Other, even though this Other is dressed in attractive soteriological garb. Both forms of Orientalism cover up the roots of our common humanity and the view that the human mind, even though profoundly affected by culture, is capable of experiencing the world and conceiving of philosophical problems in very similar ways. In his classic work *Mysticism East and West*, Rudolph Otto showed that the basic idea of the union of human soul with the divine

was common to Christianity and Hinduism. (The fact that Christian mystics find themselves at the margins of society rather than at the center, where their Asian counterparts sit, is simply a cultural variation.) More popular (and less accurate) works such as Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* have given the false impression that mysticism is the Asian philosophy par excellence. More egregious yet, some have claimed that Asian mysticism anticipates the theories of contemporary physics. Such views overlook the fact that the original philosophies of India—Jainism and Sāṃkhya—assert the radical autonomy of the individual rather than its dissolution into a divine One. Just as the Western mind is capable of mystical thought, so is the Asian mind equally able to think of human beings as individual and isolated as well. We will find that the isolated *jīva* and *puruṣa* souls of Jainism and Sāṃkhya are the main sources of Indian Titanism. In answer to Kipling's famous line "Never the twain shall meet," one could say that East and West did "meet" centuries ago just as they are meeting again today. Goethe said it best: "He who knows himself and others will also recognize that East and West cannot be set apart."[8]

The idea of an Indian Titanism has upset some practitioners of yoga and advocates of other spiritual disciplines. They represent a common view that Asian spirituality is the only answer to Western individualism and technological Titanism. Let me just say for the record that I, too, practice yoga (every day if my schedule allows); and that I have found it to be not only a solution to a lower back problem, but also a recipe for general physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Even here, however, there is surprising confirmation of my thesis in the mantra that I use for my daily meditation. I learned yoga twenty-five years ago from the Ananda Margis. The mantra they gave me was *babanam kaivalyam*, which they translated as "in the name of the father, liberate me." I did not interpret this in terms of the personal theism in which I was raised; rather, I conceived it as Gandhi himself has explained prayer: a petition by the ego self to the Higher Self.[9] But the total inwardness of this meditative state is much more intensified now that I know that the literal meaning of *kaivalya* is being totally isolated, alone, and independent. Is there a basic tendency in human beings, at least in male human beings, to escape nature and the body by Titanistic declarations of autonomy—whether through external domination through technology and politics or by journeys of inward spiritual conquest? I address the issue of gender dynamics in chapter 6—The Yogi and the Goddess—where the goddess religion is offered as a counter to spiritual Titanism.

The fact that I can find personal satisfaction in a discipline whose philosophical foundations I find unsatisfactory has forced me to reconsider the thesis that certain theories of the self—for instance, seeing the self as isolated and self-contained—will necessarily lead to certain practices. Disconfirmation of this thesis is especially strong and dramatic in Jainism, where the goal of the Jaina saint is complete separation from the body and isolation from nature. Not expected by my thesis, however, is the fact that contemporary Jainas are at the forefront of India's environmental movement. Although as a philosopher I am thwarted in my belief that practice ought to follow theory, I rejoice in the fact that, even though they are conceptually handicapped by a Manichean dualism and by an extreme individualism and anthropocentrism, the Jainas can nevertheless be great champions of nonviolence and ecological concern. By the same token I also acknowledge that the Chinese, even though their cosmology of balance and harmony should have helped them, were no more sensitive to their environment than Westerners and had less positive views of nature. Neither were they kinder to their women, although contemporary feminists should celebrate the relational self that one finds in Confucianism.

The discovery that we tend to make both other people and other cultures into the "Other" is the greatest contribution of postmodern thought. An important achievement of modernism, at least initially, was its axiom—exemplified by Descartes's search for clear and distinct ideas—that truth lies in making distinctions and in reducing to simples. A whole set of dualistic distinctions—between fact and value, object and subject, public and private, science and faith, politics and religion, and theory and practice—are the great conceptual landmarks of modernism. (As I will demonstrate in chap. 2, both modernism and its postmodern critique were already nascent in "axial" thinkers in Asia and Europe and that Titanism can be seen as the most negative form of modernism.) More and more, however, these modernist distinctions have been found to be, arguably, the cause of institutionalized racism (a modernist invention),[10] militarism, social disintegration, and environmental degradation. Rather than making the elimination of all otherness the goal—achieved in either a premodern dissolution into the One or an equally amorphous dissipation in Derridean *différance*—I have chosen the constructive postmodernist approach promoted in this SUNY Press series.

The constructive postmodern framework I choose is broader than the one found in the book *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*.

The common ground is there: major Asian philosophers reject a mechanistic worldview; many are panexperientialists; some propose nonsensuous forms of perception; most preserve the laws of logic. However, only Buddhism and Chinese philosophy reject substance metaphysics and only the Buddha of the Pāli scriptures is arguably a radical empiricist like James. The strongest expressions of pansubjectivism are found in Vedānta and Jainism—*ātman* and *jīva* reside in everything—but we will discover that the former is primarily a premodern philosophy while the Jaina's autonomous self and dualism foreshadow modernism. Therefore, only Buddhism and Confucianism truly anticipate constructive postmodern philosophy. The focus of the book will be the reconstructed self of Buddhism and the naturally social self of Confucianism. I say "naturally" because the Chinese did not ever have a substantial self such as *ātman* to react against, so the self did not have to be reconstructed. With this focus on a social, relational self I choose to embrace the "dialogical" existentialists (defined in chap. 1) as constructive postmodern philosophers.

I offer a broader view of constructive postmodern philosophy in yet another sense. I include Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein in this movement because I believe that they have been mistakenly viewed as panlinguists and as deconstructive postmodernists.[11] In other works I have demonstrated that Wittgenstein's language-games are derived from forms of life (*Lebensformen*), forms of human behavior that have both cultural and biological roots.[12] While Heidegger never refers to a biological basis for his "existentials," I have proposed a parallel between Heidegger's ways of being-in-the-world and Wittgenstein's *Lebensformen*.[13] We can, therefore, speak of a common humanity (an idea deconstructed in French postmodernism) that makes communication across cultures possible. (It is found in Wittgenstein's bedrock on which "our spade turns," a foundation that makes Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Horizontsverschmelzung* possible.) This means that when we read about the yogi's desire for complete independence, we can be confident that this is essentially the same desire that some Westerners feel in their own misdirected yearnings for complete and total freedom. To avoid the temptations of spiritual Titanism we should follow the model of the Chinese sage, who, instead of independence seeks integration, in place of autonomy chooses sociality, and rather than the conquest of nature, as the *Analects* tell us, finds "joy in water [and] . . . joy in mountains."[14]

N. F. G., Bangalore

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This project began in the early 1980s and in 1984 I had occasion to speak with Wendy Doniger about the anthropomorphism of the Puruṣa hymn and her encouragement on the first draft of chapter 5 and frequent consultations on specific textual and linguistic matters were greatly appreciated. Doniger's thorough scholarship and creative insights have been a great inspiration to me.

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# Introduction to SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought*

The rapid spread of the term *postmodern* in recent years witnesses to a growing dissatisfaction with modernity and to an increasing sense that the modern age not only had a beginning but can have an end as well. Whereas the word *modern* was almost always used until quite recently as a word of praise and as a synonym for *contemporary*, a growing sense is now evidenced that we can and should leave modernity behind—in fact, that we must if we are to avoid destroying ourselves and most of the life on our planet.

*Modernity*, rather than being regarded as the norm for human society toward which all history has been aiming and into which all societies should be ushered—forcibly if necessary—is instead increasingly seen as an aberration. A new respect for the wisdom of traditional societies is growing as we realize that they have endured for thousands of years and that, by contrast, the existence of modern civilization for even another century seems doubtful. Likewise, *modernism* as a worldview is less and less seen as the Final Truth, in comparison with which all divergent worldviews are automatically regarded as "superstitious." The modern worldview is increasingly relativized to the status of one among many, useful for some purposes, inadequate for others.

Although there have been antimodern movements before, beginning perhaps near the outset of the nineteenth century with the Romanticists and the Luddites, the rapidity with which the term *postmodern* has become widespread in our time suggests that the antimodern sentiment is more extensive and intense than before, and also that it includes the sense that modernity can be successfully overcome only by going beyond it, not by attempting to return to a premodern form of existence. Insofar as a common element is found

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*The present version of this introduction is slightly different from the first version, which was contained in the volumes that appeared prior to 2000. My thanks to Catherine Keller and Edward Carlos Munn for helpful suggestions.

in the various ways in which the term is used, *postmodernism* refers to a diffuse sentiment rather than to any common set of doctrines—the sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern.

Beyond connoting this sentiment, the term *postmodern* is used in a confusing variety of ways, some of them contradictory to others. In artistic and literary circles, for example, postmodernism shares in this general sentiment but also involves a specific reaction against "modernism" in the narrow sense of a movement in artistic-literary circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Postmodern architecture is very different from postmodern literary criticism. In some circles, the term *postmodern* is used in reference to that potpourri of ideas and systems sometimes called *new age metaphysics,* although many of these ideas and systems are more premodern than postmodern. Even in philosophical and theological circles, the term *postmodern* refers to two quite different positions, one of which is reflected in this series. Each position seeks to transcend both *modernism*, in the sense of the worldview that has developed out of the seventeenth-century Galilean-Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian science, and *modernity,* in the sense of the world order that both conditioned and was conditioned by this worldview. But the two positions seek to transcend the modern in different ways.

Closely related to literary-artistic postmodernism is a philosophical postmodernism inspired variously by physicalism, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, a cluster of French thinkers—including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva—and certain features of American pragmatism.* By the use of terms that arise out of particular segments of this movement, it can be called *deconstructive, relativistic,* or *eliminative* postmodernism. It overcomes the modern worldview through an antiworld-

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*The fact that the thinkers and movements named here are said to have inspired the deconstructive type of postmodernism should not be taken, of course, to imply that they have nothing in common with constructive postmodernists. For example, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze share many points and concerns with Alfred North Whitehead, the chief inspiration behind the present series. Furthermore, the actual positions of the founders of pragmatism, especially William James and Charles Peirce, are much closer to Whitehead's philosophical position—see the volume in this series entitled *The Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*—than they are to Richard Rorty's so-called neopragmatism, which reflects many ideas from Rorty's explicitly physicalistic period.

view, deconstructing or even entirely eliminating various concepts that have generally been thought necessary for a worldview, such as self, purpose, meaning, a real world, givenness, reason, truth as correspondence, universally valid norms, and divinity. While motivated by ethical and emancipatory concerns, this type of postmodern thought tends to issue in relativism. Indeed, it seems to many thinkers to imply nihilism.* It could, paradoxically, also be called *ultramodernism,* in that its eliminations result from carrying certain modern premises—such as the sensationist doctrine of perception, the mechanistic doctrine of nature, and the resulting denial of divine presence in the world—to their logical conclusions. Some critics see its deconstructions or eliminations as leading to self-referential inconsistencies, such as "performative self-contradictions" between what is said and what is presupposed in the saying.

The postmodernism of this series can, by contrast, be called *revisionary, constructive,* or—perhaps best—*reconstructive.* It seeks to overcome the modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews (or "metanarratives") as such, but by constructing a postmodern worldview through a revision of modern premises and traditional concepts in the light of inescapable presuppositions of our various modes of practice. That is, it agrees with deconstructive postmodernists that a massive deconstruction of many received concepts is needed. But its deconstructive moment, carried out for the sake of the presuppositions of practice, does not result in self-referential inconsistency. It also is not so totalizing as to prevent *re*construction. The reconstruction carried out by this type of postmodernism involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions (whereas post-structuralists tend to reject all such unitive projects as "totalizing modern metanarratives"). While critical of many ideas often associated with modern science, it rejects not science as such but only that *scientism* in which the data of the modern

*Peter Dews says that, although Derrida's early work was "driven by profound ethical impulses," its insistence that no concepts were immune to deconstruction "drove its own ethical presuppositions into a penumbra of inarticulacy" (*The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Culture* [London: New York: Verso, 1995], 5). In his more recent thought, Derrida has declared an "emancipatory promise" and an "idea of justice" to be "irreducible to any deconstruction." Although the "ethical turn" in deconstruction implies its pulling back from a completely disenchanted universe, it also, Dews points out (6–7), implies the need to renounce "the unconditionality of its own earlier dismantling of the unconditional."

natural sciences alone are allowed to contribute to the construction of our public worldview.

The reconstructive activity of this type of postmodern thought is not limited to a revised worldview. It is equally concerned with a postmodern *world* that will both support and be supported by the new worldview. A postmodern world will involve postmodern persons, with a postmodern spirituality, on the one hand, and a postmodern society, ultimately a postmodern global order, on the other. Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patiarchy, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Reconstructive postmodern thought provides support for the ethnic, ecological, feminist, peace, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from the destructive features of modernity itself. However, the term *postmodern,* by contrast with *premodern*, is here meant to emphasize that the modern world has produced unparalleled advances, as Critical Theorists have emphasized, which must not be devalued in a general revulsion against modernity's negative features.

From the point of view of deconstructive postmodernists, this reconstructive postmodernism will seem hopelessly wedded to outdated concepts, because it wishes to salvage a positive meaning not only for the notions of selfhood, historical meaning, reason, and truth as correspondence, which were central to modernity, but also for notions of divinity, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature, which were central to premodern modes of thought. From the point of view of its advocates, however, this revisionary postmodernism is not only more adequate to our experience but also more genuinely postmodern. It does not simply carry the premises of modernity through to their logical conclusions, but criticizes and revises those premises. By virtue of its return to organicism and its acceptance of nonsensory perception, it opens itself to the recovery of truths and values from various forms of premodern thought and practice that had been dogmatically rejected, or at least restricted to "practice," by modern thought. This reconstructive postmodernism involves a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values.

This series does not seek to create a movement so much as to help shape and support an already existing movement convinced that modernity can and must be transcended. But in light of the fact that those antimodern movements that arose in the past failed to deflect or even retard the onslaught of modernity, what reasons are there for expecting the current movement to be more successful?

First, the previous antimodern movements were primarily calls to return to a premodern form of life and thought rather than calls to advance, and the human spirit does not rally to calls to turn back. Second, the previous antimodern movements either rejected modern science, reduced it to a description of mere appearances, or assumed its adequacy in principle. They could, therefore, base their calls only on the negative social and spiritual effects of modernity. The current movement draws on natural science itself as a witness against the adequacy of the modern worldview. In the third place, the present movement has even more evidence than did previous movements of the ways in which modernity and its worldview are socially and spiritually destructive. The fourth and probably most decisive difference is that the present movement is based on the awareness that *the continuation of modernity threatens the very survival of life on our planet*. This awareness, combined with the growing knowledge of the interdependence of the modern worldview with modernity's militarism, nuclearism, patiarchy, global apartheid, and ecological devastation, is providing an unprecedented impetus for people to see the evidence for a postmodern worldview and to envisage postmodern ways of relating to each other, the rest of nature, and the cosmos as a whole. For these reasons, the failure of the previous antimodern movements says little about the possible success of the current movement.

Advocates of this movement do not hold the naively utopian belief that the success of this movement would bring about a global society of universal and lasting peace, harmony and happiness, in which all spiritual problems, social conflicts, ecological destruction, and hard choices would vanish. There is, after all, surely a deep truth in the testimony of the world's religions to the presence of a transcultural proclivity to evil deep within the human heart, which no new paradigm, combined with a new economic order, new child-rearing practices, or any other social arrangements, will suddenly eliminate. Furthermore, it has correctly been said that "life is robbery": a strong element of competition is inherent within finite existence, which no social-political-economic-ecological order can overcome. These two truths, especially when contemplated together, should caution us against unrealistic hopes.

No such appeal to "universal constants," however, should reconcile us to the present order, as if it were thereby uniquely legitimated. The human proclivity to evil in general, and to conflictual competition and ecological destruction in particular, can be greatly exacerbated or greatly mitigated by a world order and its worldview. Modernity ex-

acerbates it about as much as imaginable. We can therefore envision, without being naively utopian, a far better world order, with a far less dangerous trajectory, than the one we now have.

This series, making no pretense of neutrality, is dedicated to the success of this movement toward a postmodern world.

David Ray Griffin
Series Editor

# Introduction

> Indian philosophy *does* in fact elevate power, control or freedom to a supereminent position . . . the ultimate value. . . is not morality but freedom . . . complete control over one's environment—something which includes self-control but also includes control of others and even control of the physical sources of power in the universe.
>
> —Karl H. Potter[1]

> The great spiritual adventure of the "Crossing-Maker" [the Jaina Tīrthaṇkara], a stepping place to the superhuman sphere. That sphere, moreover, is not only superhuman but even superdivine—beyond the gods, their heavens . . . and their cosmic powers.
>
> —Heinrich Zimmer[2]

> Nuclear weapons remain the most serious danger for mankind and the most serious insult to God.
>
> —George Kennan[3]

## Introduction

It is truly ironic that the most famous gods of the world's religions—Gautama, Kṛṣṇa, and Jesus—began their religious careers as human beings. In his sermons Gautama Buddha made it clear that he had come only to teach the Dharma and that his disciples were not to worship him as a god or a savior. Although a few commentators choose to read divine attributes into the earliest reference, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* describes Kṛṣṇa as a man, the son of Vasudeva and Devakī.[4] The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels speaks of himself as a good Jew would, making a clear distinction between

himself and God. Once he rebuked those who called him good, for "no one is good but God alone."[5] An early and widespread Christology was "adoptionism," the view that Jesus was just a human being, approved and adopted by God at his baptism.

It is doubly ironic that Kṛṣṇa and Gautama actually became higher than the Vedic gods: the Buddha is called "God beyond the gods" (*devatīdeva*) and Kṛṣṇa becomes the highest expression of divinity, surpassing even Brahman itself. Already in some Upaniṣads the divine person (*puruṣa*) exceeds everything, including Brahman, and Kṛṣṇa is the culmination of this Vedic personalism. In some Christian sects, God the Father seems almost totally displaced by the worship of Jesus. (During the Protestant Reformation this heresy was called *Jesuologie* and some mainstream Protestants considered it a form of atheism.) At the World Congress of Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda defended the atheism of Buddhism and Jainism by arguing that it is perfectly legitimate "to evolve God out of man." He then presented what appears to be the "Buddhology" equivalent of *Jesuologie*: "They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son."[6] We shall see shortly how Vivekananda's Vedāntist assumptions lead to an alternative interpretation of this passage.

## The Titans: Superhuman and Superdivine

Heinrich Zimmer has called the preemption of divine prerogatives and confusion of human and divine attributes the "heresy of Titanism,"[7] and it could be that the deification of Gautama, Kṛṣṇa, Mahāvīra, Jesus, and other religious figures may constitute a form of spiritual Titanism. Zimmer observes that Titans are not only superhuman, but they, as we have just seen, are superdivine; and as such, they are involved in a supergodly task. Even the gods accrue karma, so the human savior will also become the redeemer of the gods. To my knowledge, no one has ever worked out the details of Zimmer's thesis with regard to Indian forms of Titanism. Standing in the shadow of a giant in his own right, I presume to take up that task in this book.

Titanism is an extreme form of humanism that does not recognize that there are limits to what humans can become and what they should do. (Hesiod related, incorrectly as it turns out, the meaning of "Titan" to two words—*titaínein* (to stretch, to strive, or to exert) and *tísis* (retribution)—i.e., punishment for their overex-

ertion.)[8] The Greek Titans were known for their boundless pride (*hubris*) and for their violence (*atasthalítē*). Titanism is humanism gone berserk; it is anthropocentricism and anthropomorphism taken to their limits. The Titan insists that human experience is the norm. Titans deliberately reverse the positions of humanity and divinity; they take over divine prerogatives, and as a result of their hubris, they lose sight of their proper place in the universe. This book will define a deity as any being who is omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, and omnipresent. We maintain that a human being is a spiritual Titan by claiming any or all of these attributes. Even if there is no God, humans obviously delude themselves if they believe that they can become divine in the sense of these attributes.

Following Zimmer's lead, we will identify five types of Indian Titanism. The first is Asura Titanism, discussed in chapter 3, in which the *asuras* (demons, antigods, or Titans) constantly battle the Hindu gods. The second is Brahmin Titanism, in which the priests take over the divine power of the sacrifice. The third is Gnostic Titanism, in which humans contend that they have perfect knowledge. The fourth is Yoga Titanism, in which yogis claim to have divine powers by the practice of austerities. (Gnostic and Yoga Titanism are intimately linked in Jainism, where yogic discipline leads to absolute knowledge. But they are separate in Sāṃkhya-Yoga, where the practice leads to spiritual liberation but knowledge without content, and in Purānic mythology where the practice of austerities leads to great power not knowledge.) Finally, there is Bhakti Titanism, in which humans such as Kṛṣṇa are bestowed with powers of universal redemption. The common thread throughout these five forms of Titanism is a determined attempt to acquire and to monopolize total power.

Except for the violent *asura-deva* conflict, Indian Titanism has expressed itself almost exclusively in an internal, spiritual way; therefore, one can say that it is a rather benign form of extreme humanism. By contrast, the expressions of Western Titanism are primarily external, and with the aid of technology, a Titanistic spirit can be said to inspire militarism, environmental pollution and degradation, and the possible misuse of genetic engineering. If left unchecked, Titanism might destroy or radically change life as we know it on earth. Even though it is technological Titanism that poses the real threat, it is essential to show that Indian Titans share some of the same views as their Western counterparts, namely, anthropocentrism and autonomous selfhood. Some Indian views of self—

particularly the Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Jainism—express a view of human autonomy just as extreme as existentialism. Therefore, early Indian and Western philosophy share a basic conceptual bond that has been rarely discerned or mentioned.

The term *Titan* comes from a race of older gods, who, under the leadership of Prometheus, contended with Zeus and with the other Olympian deities for the control of the universe. Western humanists have generally viewed the Promethean revolt not only as a necessary transgression but as a good one. Byron claimed that Prometheus' only "crime" was that he liberated humanity:

> Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,
> to render with thy precepts less
> the sum of human wretchedness
> And strengthen Man with his own mind.[9]

In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound* Percy Bysshe Shelly claimed that "Prometheus is . . . the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives of the best and noblest ends."[10] Mary Shelly described her husband as a spiritual Titan: he thought that "man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation. . . ."[11]

Goethe's poem "Prometheus" is remarkable both in terms of the liberties he takes with the myth and the insights that he nonetheless offers for this study. First, Goethe makes the Greek gods just as dependent on the sacrifice as the Vedic gods:

> I know of nothing more wretched
> Under the sun than you gods!
> Meagerly you nourish
> Your majesty
> On dues of sacrifice
> And breath of prayers
> And would suffer want
> But for children and beggars,
> Poor hopeful fools.[12]

Goethe allows Zeus to have his heaven and to play his games there, but Prometheus has given earth to humanity and to them alone. Zeus can only envy humans, and they, in turn can only pity the gods. As Lord of the Earth, as Protoanthropos, Prometheus proclaims:

Here I sit, forming men
In my image,
A race to resemble me:
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad—
and never to heed you,
like me!
to have no regard for you.[13]

In fragments of a play Goethe wrote on Prometheus, Epimetheus urges his brother to take Zeus' offer to reside on Mt. Olympus. Asserting the stubborn independence that the Greek writers gave him, Prometheus' answer anticipates Milton's Satan: it is far preferable to rule on earth rather than to serve in heaven. Staying on earth the Titan possesses a power that even the gods do not have, the power to create a living world:

Here is my world, my all!
Here I know who I am!
Here—all my wishes
Embodied in these figures,
My spirit split a thousand ways
Yet whole in my beloved children.[14]

The hymns of the Ṛgveda were not yet known to Europeans, but Goethe had created an image very similar to the Puruṣa hymn, a thousand-headed cosmic man who forms the very body and contents of the universe. But unlike this Vedic hymn, which only hints at the necessity of a corollary feminine power in the word *virāj*, Goethe follows one version of the Greek myth that has Athene actively aiding Prometheus in his earthly creations. Unlike the great Indian yogis, Prometheus realizes that "you [Minerva = Athene] are to my spirit as it is to itself" and that his creative powers grow in her presence, which are "the sources of all life."[15] We will discover that this joining of *animus* and *anima* is one significant difference between Prometheanism and the spiritual Titanism of India.

There are too many parallels, however, between Satan and Prometheus for most Christians to be completely comfortable with Prometheus as a model for human action. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, however, saw more contrasts than similarities:

> Satan suffered from his ambition; Prometheus from his humanity: Satan for himself; Prometheus for mankind: Satan

> dared peril which he had not weighed; Prometheus devoted himself to sorrows which he had foreknown. . . . The Satan of Milton and the Prometheus of Aeschylus stand upon ground as unequal as do the sublime of sin and the sublime of virtue.[16]

Some of the early Church fathers actually agreed with Browning, and they saw Prometheus as one who, like Job, prefigures Christ. Some of them noted the parallel in the creation of humanity out of clay and their descent into Hell, and Tertullian was willing to grant a mythical foreshadowing of the Passion of Christ in "the stories of the sacrifices of the Taurians . . . the torments of the Caucasus."[17] Simone Weil's view of Prometheus represents a twentieth-century extension of Tertullian's view: "The story of Prometheus is like the refraction into eternity of the Passion of Christ. Prometheus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."[18] In chapter 3 I will analyze mitigating factors in the Prometheus myth that lead me to distinguish between Prometheanism and Titanism.

Even though I have chosen to give the term *Titanism* a negative connotation, I do not wish to give the impression that more knowledge or even new technology is undesirable; and I certainly do not mean to imply that we do not need heroes or saints. It is sometimes said that our heroes are "larger than life," or alternatively it is said that "we stand on the shoulders of giants" in relation to them. I contend that these images represent a distortion of how heroes are actually made. These ideas are also most likely responsible for the mistaken view, expressed for example in Hobbes's monarch or in Raskalnikov's Napoleon, that some people are beyond our ken and above the law. Therefore, I believe that we require a new vision of human nature, one that breaks with both the autonomous self and the yogic self, which is exhorted to be totally independent from others and separate from an unredeemable nature.

Humanism arose during the so-called axial period, and it is commonly observed that while the Greeks generally responded to the discovery of human individuality by externalizing their new desires in a positive way, the Indians turned inward in an attempt to reconcile anxieties caused by an increased awareness of the self-world split. But even in their world-denying practices, many Indian thinkers have remained very much attached to the human form. They have made it the prototype for the shape and origin of the universe (some Jainas are most explicit on this point); they have made it the locus of all spiritual liberation—to be saved the gods must