

On Presents and Presence: The Gift in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

One can say with total security that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism—the very condition for ethnology—should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics.

—Jacques Derrida “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”

Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging—these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such*...

—*Toward a Genealogy of Morals*, II, 8

Nietzsche warned us that it would be difficult to read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He told Heinrich von Stein, who had complained that he did not understand a word of the book, that “having understood six sentences from it—that is, to have really experienced them—would raise one to a higher level of existence than ‘modern’ men could attain” (*EH*, 259; 6, 299). In the “Foreword” to *Ecce Homo* he says that with *Zarathustra* he has “given mankind the greatest present (*Geschenk*) that has been made to it so far” (*EH*, 219; 6, 259). So Nietzsche claims to have

made us a present, a gift, an offer that we can't understand, and the language of gift-giving suggests that he expects a certain gratitude in return. The gift, giving, exchange, the *es gibt*—all these, we'll soon see, are repeated themes in *Zarathustra*. But I want to begin by considering the way in which Nietzsche articulates these dimensions of *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*. Perhaps, if this may be said without *hubris* (although how avoid *hubris* here?) we may now be in a position to begin to think about a few sentences from this uncanny text for all and none.

In the last section of the Foreword to *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche makes three observations about *Zarathustra* or, what is the same thing, issues three protocols concerned with how the book should be read. The *first*, which I already have quoted, tells us that it is "*das grosste Geschenk*" ever given to mankind, in so far as it is the highest book, a book of the heights. The *second* observation or protocol, which in a way follows from the first, is that everything depends on the ear with which one hears the tone that comes from the mouth that speaks here: *Man muss vor Allem den Ton, der aus diesem Mund kommt, diesen halkyonischen Ton richtig hören, um den Sinn seiner Weisheit nicht erbarmunswürdig Unrecht zu tun* ("Above all one must hear aright the tone that comes from his mouth, the halcyon tone, lest one should do wretched injustice to the meaning of its wisdom"). We cannot accept a gift that we cannot hear. One who "hears aright" will not, for example, confuse this voice with that of a prophet. *Third*, Nietzsche anticipates a question, "Is not Zarathustra in view of all this a *seducer*?" That is, if hearing correctly means that one is forced to attune oneself in a certain way, should the process of hearing and reading then be described as the deployment of a strategy, rhetorical and erotic, such that simply listening to the offer or considering the present captivates the reader or listener unawares? To this Nietzsche replies, as he does so frequently in analogous circumstances, by quoting one of Zarathustra's speeches. The speech at the end of "The Gift-Giving Virtue" ("*Die schenkende Tugend*") concludes the first part of the book, the same speech (I will not repeat here all of Nietzsche's repetition) in which Zarathustra says to his disciples "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil. And why do you not want to pluck at my wreath?"

All of these protocols have to do with the thematics and dynamics of giving and receiving. The first tells us what *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is: it is a gift—the greatest one yet. Do we know how Nietzsche thinks the gift? Or must we read *Zarathustra*, which begins with an invocation of the endlessly giving sun and ends with a party or potlatch that Zarathustra throws or “gives” for the higher men, a party that blows them all away, to see what might be involved in giving and receiving gifts? And what might we make of the statement in the interleaf page of *Ecce Homo* where he names three books as “presents” (*Geschenke*) of the last year or even of its last quarter? Who was the giver if Nietzsche was the receiver? He asks a question whose emphasis suggests that it is more than rhetorical: “How could I fail to be grateful to my own life?” In the case of a great gift from an identifiable other, one certainly could ask “how could I fail to be grateful?” that is, would it not be ignoble not to show the proper thanks? But when the gift’s source is not so clear one might ask “how can I be grateful—or fail to be grateful?” How does one give to oneself, or more precisely, how does one’s *life* give something to one and then how does one respond? *Ecce Homo* offers something of an answer to this last question: Nietzsche expresses his gratitude by telling or narrating his life to himself. And is the book that constitutes that telling another gift? Is it to be ascribed to the same “life” that Nietzsche is grateful to, thus increasing his debt, or is it rather his gift in return, perhaps the last gift in a cycle of exchanges? Odd questions that we must begin to attempt to circumscribe and articulate.

The *second* protocol of the Foreword cautions us about the *reception* of what we hear. Something is said but it is unclear whether the sayer is Zarathustra or Nietzsche, however, we will perceive it correctly only if we catch its precise tone. We might note that perceiving, *Wahrnehmen* (as its construction in several languages suggests), always is a kind of *receiving* or taking. Moreover, in these enigmatic protocols, which may share in the ambivalence we so often find characterizing the gift, Nietzsche advises us *how* the book’s tone should be characterized; that is, how we ought to hear it. The tone that comes from the mouth, the nonprophetic tone, is “the halcyon tone.” I want

to defer the discussion of what the *halcyon* means in Nietzsche's texts. But let us note now that it has to do with a story of passion, death, metamorphosis, giving, and receiving that go beyond the episodic or individual level to the cyclical marking or transformation of space and time. Let us recall that Alcyone who gives her name to "the halcyon," was transformed into a sea bird when she desperately willed to follow Ceyx, her drowned husband. And as a result of this transformation the sea observes an annual period of calm each year so that the halcyon (kingfisher) birds can hatch their eggs in those miraculous floating nests described by such ancient authorities as Aristotle, Plutarch, and Ovid. Later we will ask to what extent Nietzsche's naming of the halcyon tone is also a naming of Alcyone and her destiny.

The *third* protocol warns us against a misapprehension. It seems to repeat that contempt for a merely passive, receptive reader expressed in "On Reading and Writing" where Zarathustra says that he "hates the reading idler" (Z 67, 4, 48). It reminds us that Zarathustra rejects any simple discipleship and promises to return to his then-disciples only when they have turned away from him. But we should also attend to the strategy of Nietzsche's citation here. From the book that he has just called the *greatest present* ever given to mankind, he has quoted some of Zarathustra's discourse on "*die schenkende Tugend*." He chooses to remind the readers of *Ecce Homo* of a text in which Zarathustra: (1) receives a gift from his disciples upon leaving them; (2) offers an interpretation of the gift itself; (3) expounds the supremacy of the gift-giving virtue; and (4) issues the warning quoted, which, in effect, distinguishes the seductive use of gifts from some other social form or practice (let us temporarily call it the practice of a *certain reciprocity*, although it is a reciprocity whose terms are yet to be discovered).

The question of the gift, then, is internal to the text of *Zarathustra*. So we will want to know what it is to be a gift, to be a giver, to be a receiver—and these are questions that arise throughout the book (a gift for all and none).¹ It will be useful to recall some of the ways in which giving and everything associated with it are clearly problematized within the text. For example (but it is more than an example) in the series of eco-

nostic speeches in which he weighs and measures the "three evils"—sex, the lust to rule, and selfishness—Zarathustra considers each of these both in the "evil" form in which it is conventionally stigmatized and the transvalued form in which it appears to him after his return home, the return in which he now finds his own language. Of the lust to rule (*Herrschaft*), he says

The lust to rule—but who would call it *lust* (*Sucht*) when what is high longs downward for power? Verily, there is nothing diseased or lustful in such longing and condescending. That the lonely heights should not remain lonely and self-sufficient eternally; that the mountain should descend to the low plains—oh, who were to find the right name for such longing? "Gift-giving virtue"—thus Zarathustra once named the unnameable. (*Z*, 208, 4, 238)

Let us think for a moment about the frame within which Zarathustra speaks of naming the unnameable. Like so many of Zarathustra's speeches, it is a report on a dream, "the last dream of the morning" when he "stood in the foothills" and "beyond the world, held scales, and weighed the world." So Zarathustra will be giving us a report on what we will provisionally (and only provisionally) call the *value of the world*. However, from the very beginning this evaluation, this morning stock market report on the value of the world's values, is tinged with a sense of the problematic character of the enterprise of weighing the world. Perhaps this idea of weighing, which involves measure and comparison, was suggested (Zarathustra guesses) by his own day wisdom. For if measuring and weighing have something pinched and prosaic about them, the idea of a total weighing and measuring of the world is dreamlike. (Blake said "Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth.") Weighing the world stands somewhere between dreaming and waking. This project requires that the world be thought of as measurable and in some sense quantifiable. It requires, as Zarathustra says, a mockery of all "infinite worlds." If the world were infinite, or if there were indeed an infinity of worlds, measuring and weighing would

be subject to a radical indeterminacy. But here, at least for day wisdom, the principle is: "Wherever there is force, *number* will become mistress: She has more force." What is weighed, then, is "this finite world." *This* world: the actual world of our hopes, regrets, dreams, and experience. This *finite* world: only the finite can be measured.

In this context Zarathustra recalls that he once named the longing of the lonely heights as the *gift-giving virtue* (*die schenkende Tugend*). When he did so he was naming the unnamable. But why is it unnameable? Perhaps it is significant that Marcel Mauss says something similar in his *Essay on the Gift*. Mauss argues that gift giving, exchange, and potlatch are totalistic phenomena of archaic cultures that cannot be understood in terms of the individualistic and economic categories of modern rationality. The practices connected with the gift, its exchange, and circulation are unnameable within a social and economic order assuming the priority of private accumulation and possession; in such a context the gift is an occasional matter, an exception reserved for holidays and special events rather than the very nerve of communal life. The crowd in the marketplace, to whom Zarathustra first attempts to give his gift, can understand neither him nor the practice and discourse within which such giving is possible. The last man is the ultimate creature of the marketplace with his "little pleasure for the day and his little pleasure for the night." When Zarathustra presents what should be a horrifying picture of the last man to the people in the marketplace they ask for *this* gift, not that of the *Übermensch*. In fact they offer a deal, an exchange: "'Give us this last man, Zarathustra,' they cried, 'make us into this last man! You can keep the superman!'" ("*So schenken wir den Übermenschen!*") (Z, 47; 4, 20).

In Nietzsche the failure to understand and the gap between speaker and hearer typically is situated in the marketplace. That is where the madman appears one morning to announce the death of God; while the stock market thinks that it already has discounted its values in anticipation of this information, the madman is telling the traders that they have yet to understand. He ends his day not on the floor of the exchange, but in the churches, singing requiems for the dead God (GS,

125; 3, 482). Not only is gift giving (which I will use as a kind of abbreviation for all the associated practices) unnameable from the perspective of the market, but if it should be named, as it is by the Kwakiutl or the Melanesians, for example, then our own moral categories treating of property and individuality would be put in question. Such groups typically have “only a single word to cover buy and sell, borrow and lend.... Concepts which we like to put in opposition—freedom and obligation; generosity, liberality, luxury on the one hand and saving, interest, austerity on the other—are not exact and it would be well to put them to the test.”² As an example of this confounding of categories Mauss says something that recalls Zarathustra’s equation of *Herrschaft* and *schenkende Tugend*. In what has now become an anthropological commonplace he observes that “Even the destruction of wealth does not correspond to the complete disinterestedness which one might expect.” Despite the appearance of mad, frenzied destruction, of “wasteful expenditure” these activities are not disinterested: “Between vassals and chiefs, between vassals and their henchmen, the hierarchy is established by means of these gifts. To give is to show one’s superiority.... To accept without returning is to face subordination.”³ As Jacques Derrida observes in *Spurs*, with reference to Mauss and the Maussian tradition, taking this gift giving seriously could lead to alternatives to the Western economico-metaphysical tradition that valorizes individuals and their property and that continues to flourish in an implicit form in Heidegger’s thought of the giving in *es gibt* and of the *Eigentum* in *das Ereignis*.⁴

Let us say then that gift giving is unnameable for complex reasons. It is unnameable from within a culture based on private property, the market, and quantifiable exchange. As contemporary anthropologists point out with respect to the work of pioneers such as Mauss, to speak of cultures dominated by ceremonial exchange in terms of the gift runs the risk of superimposing our own social categories on the Melanesians or the Kwakiutl. For we have reserved a certain place for the gift in which it plays the role of that which is *other* than our standard or normal form of dealing with goods, property, and people; gift giving has specific functions within an economy of com-

modities. We run the risk, in transferring this economic anomaly to those who are other than we are (our anthropological others), of seeing them in terms of our own ceremonies. But the Melanese (for example) are not celebrating a constant round of birthday parties. Whatever name we give to gift giving we ought to be aware that we are risking a deformation of social categories. And for that matter, what is involved in the anthropologist "giving" a name to the practices of people in another culture? This giving, especially when done on a global scale, as we name the life of the other, itself may have some of the aggressive features of the potlatch or of a Nietzschean "lust to rule," except that the "beneficiaries," in this case, have no access to the means of global communication that would allow them to "return" the gift.

"From Mauss to Lévi-Strauss" (as Merleau-Ponty says), from Mauss to Bataille to Derrida, the gift, expenditure, or *dépense*, the general economy have been proposed as names of the unnameable and these names sometimes have been used to read Nietzsche differently, especially by Bataille and those who have taken him seriously, including Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Deleuze and Guattari. Of course these thinkers are hardly in agreement concerning Nietzsche or with regard to the Maussian themes affiliated with the gift, and if one speaks of a "Maussian tradition" (as I did just now) it must be recognized that the bonds and affiliations are genealogical rather than axiomatic.⁵ There would be evident here, if one wished to analyze it, a complex network of gifts and exchanges, of antioedipal potlatches in which Nietzsche circulates as a gift only to be disseminated or deconstructed. And because in the circular ontology of the world of the gift, what goes around comes around, Nietzsche receives and suffers as much as he gives and inspires.

The complexity of gift giving already is announced and enacted at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the generalized economy of gift giving the gift is "for all and none," so it is put into circulation, and eventually it passes through the entire social world; but it is destined to be a permanent possession for none (in gift giving societies the corresponding status may be marked by the complete wasting, destruction, or expenditure of the object in question). In the *Vorrede*, Zarathustra's

first speech is to the sun, whom he personifies and praises for his *schenkende Tugend*: "You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?" And Zarathustra too is overfull: "Behold, I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it."

"I would give away and distribute (*verschenken und austeilen*), until the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches" (Z, 39; 4, 11). *Verschenken und austeilen*: these name the processes of expenditure that constitute Zarathustra's *Untergehen* among men. To live in solitude, as Zarathustra has done for ten long years, is *not* to give, but his entrance into society must be marked by gift giving. And at the same time that he praises the sun, who always gives and never receives, he names the deficiency, the vice that corresponds to the gift-giving virtue: "So bless me then, you quiet eye that can look upon an all-too-great-happiness without envy (*Neid*)!" Envy, we learn later (for example, in "On the Tree on the Mountainside"), is a disease of the eye, the evil eye that characterizes the economic stance of the resentful who practice a morality of good and evil. When Zarathustra confesses to envy in "The Night Song," it is a complex, paradoxical envy of the receiver by the giver; he longs to surrender his blazing light to accept another's gifts.

Those who live alone exist in a precarious and sensitive relation to the modalities of giving and receiving exemplified by the extremes of the quiet or the evil eye. The evil eye, we could say, would destroy a good thing or another's happiness not in a spirit of festive expenditure and not to take possession of it for itself but simply to free itself from the pain caused by that good or by the happiness of another.⁶ It is worth noting, then, that Zarathustra's first contact, after his solitary silence, is with a hermit who recognizes him by the purity of his eyes: "*Ja, ich erkenne Zarathustra. Rein ist sein Auge und an seinen Munde birgt sich keine Ekel.*" "Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eye is pure and no disgust lurks about his mouth." That Zarathustra will later express envy of a sort and plumb the depths of nausea and disgust ought not to obscure the importance of the hermit's identifying Zarathustra as one who is fit to give and

receive. This is Zarathustra's first conversational exchange and the subject is the varieties of exchange itself. *Why* does Zarathustra go down to men, to "sleepers," demands the hermit. Zarathustra's first answer is "I love man," but the hermit easily replies that love of man is precisely *his* reason for having retreated into his solitude: man is unworthy of love, love of man would be fatal for him. Zarathustra's self-correction is speedy: "Did I speak of love? I bring men a gift (*ein Geschenk*)" (Z, 40; 4, 13).

There is much to think about in this contrast between love and gift giving. Perhaps the most obvious implication is that the gift always may be ambiguous; it may not be, and perhaps never is, the correlate of a purely disinterested act of bestowing. The gift places the recipient under an obligation, an obligation burdensome in proportion to its value. This is one of those valuable principles of worldly wisdom that can be derived from the aphorisms of books such as *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak*. And we might wonder, if *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* itself is to be regarded as the greatest gift ever given to humanity, under what obligations of reciprocity does it place humanity, and how ought we to respond to the gift? Clearly the gift that Zarathustra has in mind is not one that will be received with ease. In fact it is hardly clear at this early point in the story what that gift is and whether Zarathustra himself has a clear and constant conception of what he will be giving. If the gift is the thought of the *Übermensch* or that of eternal recurrence then we may wonder if Zarathustra knows yet just what those gifts are. To accept such gifts requires some understanding of them, an understanding clearly lacking in the people Zarathustra addresses in the marketplace. But if they were to accept such gifts, gifts that carry with them abysmal thoughts, they would have to go under, as Zarathustra tells them. The gift-giving virtue is the lust to rule.

Zarathustra's entire exchange with the hermit articulates these ambiguities of the gift relationship. And of course as an *exchange* it also exemplifies these very same ambiguities, for Zarathustra is a speaker and what he has to give are his words. That we call conversation *exchange* suggests that there is an *economics* of speech as well as a grammar and a rhetoric.

"Give them nothing!" said the saint. Rather take something off them and bear it with them—that will please them best; if only it be pleasing to you! And if you want to give to them, give no more than alms, and let them beg for that!" "No," answered Zarathustra. "I give no alms. I am not poor enough for that."

It is worth noticing that Zarathustra simply ignores the suggestion that he ought to take part of men's load from them. Later, however, in the chapter "Of Redemption" he replies to a hunchback who has asked why Zarathustra will not perform miraculous cures. There he explains that to take the hump away from the hunchback, to lighten his load, would be to take his spirit from him. But Zarathustra does reply to the hermit's suggestion that he make men beg for alms. That would be a kind of poverty, for it would presuppose that one did not have the strength and riches for a fuller exchange. The hermit knows that Zarathustra's entrance into society will be difficult. If he has treasures (*Schätze*) to give he must beware of men's wariness in accepting them, for they are "mistrustful of hermits" and will more readily see them as thieves than as benefactors. That is, gifts and exchange are expected; they form the very principle of sociality when there is some tie or ongoing communication among people. The outsider will be feared as a thief. How should we understand the encounter of the two hermits, Zarathustra on his way down to man and the saint who, as he explains himself, praises god by "singing, crying, laughing, and humming" in the forest? And despite the hermit's apparent self-sufficiency he expects something from Zarathustra for he asks "what do you bring us as a gift?" However, Zarathustra is all discretion and leaves quickly so as not to take anything from this hermit who has yet to hear that God is dead. By echoing the simplest question of the child to a parent returning from a trip—"what did you bring me?"—the hermit shows how difficult it is to be truly isolated. The gift economy is ready to be activated at any time. And Zarathustra observes at least one principle of hospitality by discreetly refusing to disillusion his host. This first conversational exchange is an artful exercise in diplomacy; words are skillfully deployed to ensure that the balance remains what it was before the encounter.

Questions have been raised, however, by Zarathustra's meeting with the hermit. The encounter could be taken as Nietzsche's transformation of the fable of the state of nature. Two isolated figures meet, figures who as hermits are represented as self-sufficient. But they enact neither the Hobbesian war of all against all nor the Hegelian battle to the death that is resolved only through the elementary social form of lord and bondsman. Instead they engage in a highly ceremonial and subtly orchestrated discussion of gifts, in which each verbal gesture is a giving or a receiving. Of course that analogy with the state of nature is deceiving, for both Zarathustra and the old hermit are themselves voluntary exiles from the world of men. Yet standing at the verge of Zarathustra's story, this meeting can be taken as emblematic. It provides a view of the social relation that implicitly rejects a political economy or anthropology that assumes the priority of rational, self-interested individuals.

Giving and receiving are both fraught with danger. *Die schenkende Tugend*, like other virtues, requires courage. Nietzsche read this in Emerson (whose essay "Gifts" is cited by Mauss as an anticipation of his own anthropological insights). Certainly a careful reading of "Gifts" would both help to alter the still popular picture of Emerson as a cheery and superficial sage (humming to God in the forest) and would demonstrate the ground of the elective affinity Nietzsche discovered with the American philosopher. Emerson writes that

The law of benefits is a difficult channel, which requires careful sailing, or rude boats. It is not the office of a man to receive gifts. How dare you give them? We wish to be self-sustained. We do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten. We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourselves; but not from any one who assumes to bestow.⁷

For Emerson both giving and receiving entail risks and are capable of multiple forms of perversion and degradation. Giving itself is degraded when one substitutes a commodity expressly designed to be given for the true gift. Emerson admonishes us that "Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but

apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me." He seems to recognize that gift giving is seen by both giver and recipient as a sign of power, or of the *Herrschaft* that for Nietzsche is its other name. So, for example, "[y]ou cannot give anything to a magnanimous person. After you have served him he at once puts you in debt by his magnanimity."⁸ Gift giving risks undermining the masks, as Nietzsche calls them, that are necessary for our protection. In giving a gift one undertakes the hermeneutical project of discovering what is appropriate to the true character of the recipient. If I fail to interpret him properly, he will feel that some violence or degradation has been done; but if the donor succeeds in reading the heart of the donee the latter may feel that his private space has been invaded and his very joy at the gift will confirm the donor in his interpretation of the man behind the mask. Some of the bi- or multivalence of giving is apparent in Nietzsche's notes from the time of the composition of *Zarathustra*:

It's more than a matter of giving: it's also a matter of creating and violence (*Vergewaltigen*)! The essential thought of the second solitude (beginning of III)

Our "gifts" (*Geschenke*) are dangerous. (10, 512)⁹

And in a note entitled "Plan for *Zarathustra* III" he writes "giving (*das Schenken*) transforms itself—from giving (*Geben*) arose the practice of forcing someone to receive (*Zwang-zum-Nehmen*)" (10, 516). In the next sentence Nietzsche writes of "the tyranny of the artist," suggesting that we ought not to suppose that the artist is simply a spontaneous giver; in his giving there is also a withholding and a violent imposition.

Nietzsche often expresses his sense of indebtedness and gratitude to Emerson. Perhaps a large part of the substance of that debt is a complex of themes drawn from economic thought, taken in the most comprehensive sense: debt, gifts, compensation, squandering, and the like. The external signs of indebtedness have been noted several times, and the spirit of the relation is captured in two jottings from the time of *The Gay Science*:

1. *Emerson*.—Never have I felt so much at home in a book, and in *my* home, as—I may not praise it, it is too close to me. (9, 588)
2. The author who has been richest in ideas in this century has so far been an American (unfortunately made obscure by German philosophy—frosted glass).¹⁰

The first statement locates the relationship within an order of respect, nobility, honor, and exchange. To praise Emerson would be to praise himself; here in the privacy of his notes Nietzsche forbears to do what he does as public thinking in works such as *Ecce Homo*. The second note tells us that Nietzsche does not find Emerson's riches in a recycling of German philosophy, as some commentators have suggested. According to those accounts, Emerson would simply have been the medium by which Nietzsche could draw on his own national heritage, a heritage that he could not explicitly accept because of his polemics against the theological prejudices of Kant, Hegel, and their philosophical kin. Nietzsche's notes for *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are full of references to Emerson and citations from his *Essays*. Very often the same notebook entry will contain such references along with specific plans for one of these books. Let us explore one of these sketches for it suggests something of the economies of friendship, the gift, and the state.

Zarathustra recognizes that he is also not there for his friends "Who are my friends?" Neither for the people, nor for individuals. *Neither for the many nor for the few! Friendship is to be overcome! Signs of self-overcoming at the beginning of III.*

Emerson p. 426 description of the wise man. (10, 512)

The passage from Emerson's essay "Politics" is a long one but it displays both the non-Germanic character of the riches Nietzsche finds in Emerson and themes that are recognizable in the published text of *Zarathustra III*.

Hence the less government we have the better—the fewer laws, and the less confided power. The antidote to this

abuse of formal Government is the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual; the appearance of the principal to supersede the proxy; the appearance of the wise man; of whom the existing government is, it must be owned, but a shabby imitation. That which all things tend to educe; which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver, is character; that is the end of nature, to reach unto this coronation of her king. To educate the wise man the State exists, and with the appearance of the wise man the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy—he loves men too well; no bride, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable circumstance. He needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is a prophet; no statute-book, for he has the lawgiver; no money, for he is value; no road, for he is at home where he is; no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him, and looks from his eyes. He has no personal friends, for he who has the spell to draw the prayer and piety of all men unto him need not husband and educate a few to share with him a select and poetic life. His relation to men is angelic; his memory is myrrh to them; his presence, frankincense and flowers.¹¹

Recall that *Zarathustra* III, whose sketch cites this Emersonian passage, portrays a long journey of homecoming in which Zarathustra progressively takes his leave of various forms of social and political life with which he first became engaged in going down to men after a ten years' solitude and then in a second sojourn after a dream came to warn him that his teaching was in danger. When Zarathustra the wise finally comes home to himself he rejoices that he no longer needs to speak the distorting language of the crowd (in "The Homecoming") and he struggles silently with his most abysmal thought, after which he breaks out into a series of songs for which there is no audience of friends or spectators. Of the wise man Emerson says that "he has no personal friends" because he has "the spell to draw the prayer and piety of all men unto him," a formula that

could describe the way in which the higher men seek out Zarathustra in the last part of Nietzsche's book. The wise man is portrayed as beyond the contractual requirements of the state and the money economy. His "presence" to men takes the form of presents: "His relation to men is angelic; his memory is myrrh to them; his presence, frankincense and flowers." In the next few sentences Emerson adds that Malthus and Ricardo, that is the theorists of political economy, have no way of recording or even suspecting the existence of the "presence" of character. As angelic the wise man is a gift, a luminous visitation. Emerson discusses the nature of this gift in his essay on that subject. Although his advice there that "Flowers and Fruits are always fit presents" may sound like a simpering cliché, the reason adduced is one that shows a rigorous economic logic:

flowers, because they are a proud assertion that a ray of beauty outvalues all the utilities of the world.... Fruits are acceptable gifts, because they are the flower of commodities, and admit of fantastic values being attached to them.¹²

In the same essay, however, Emerson notes that once we give gifts of a more specific nature by which we aim at discerning or matching the particular character of our friends, we enter into a risky business in which the receiver may feel offended either by our failure to understand him or by our having understood him all too well.

Consider the economic thought of Emerson's essay "Compensation," which develops what could be thought of as a general economy of life. The essay begins by arguing against the conventional religious view that there is no justice in this life but that there is an appropriate compensation in the next one. Such a view amounts to a needless doubling of the world, generated by the resentment of those who think that they see the wicked prosper while their own virtue goes unrewarded. It also seems to suggest that the rewards of the virtuous life simply are those things like stocks and champagne denied to the poor in this world. Here Emerson comes close to providing an account of the creation of a fictitious secondary world resembling the one that Nietzsche gives in the first essay of *Toward a*

Genealogy of Morals. It also is suggested that it is possible to affirm this world in all of its variety, with its circulation of credits and debits, without reference to anything beyond or outside it: "Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced and swallowing up all relations, parts and times within itself." What's most remarkable however in the economic doctrine of "Compensation" is Emerson's prescription of what appears to be an inversion of the debtor-creditor analogy as it applies to man and God: "Put God in your debt. Every stroke shall be repaid. The longer payment is withholden, the better for you; for compound interest on compound interest is the rate and usage of this exchequer."¹³ The Christian view, as Nietzsche develops it in the second essay of *Toward a Genealogy of Morals* is that we owe an immeasurable debt to God, one that could not possibly be repaid. God's grace through Christ is equivalent to writing off a bad debt, but it is a forgiveness that leaves the debtors with the feeling that the debt could not possibly have been repaid through their own efforts. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche is quoting from Emerson's "Gifts" when he says: "Frankincense.—Buddha says: 'Do not flatter your benefactors.' Repeat this saying in a Christian church: right away it clears the air of everything Christian" (GS, 142; 3, 489).¹⁴ When Zarathustra replies to the hermit, "I give no alms. For that I am not poor enough," we can take him to be commenting on such a completely asymmetric relationship of giver and receiver. When one gives alms, for which one expects no return whatsoever, one humiliates the objects of one's charity by placing them in a situation that emphasizes their impotence and incapacity. Zarathustra's remark says, in effect, that the need to establish such an asymmetry is itself a form of poverty, for one who was rich, strong, and overflowing would take delight in the contest and circulation of gift exchange. The call to "Put God in your debt" is the principle of an economy of excess in which one is willing to compete with the wealthiest. Zarathustra's first speech begins by taking the constantly giving sun as his model; the sun gives to excess, but it also provokes responses in the form of growth, flowering, and energy.

A reading of *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*, a book that also deals with the earliest economic relationships, could lead to the

conclusion that Nietzsche explicitly rejects the possibility of an economy of the gift. For there he seems to suggest that the oldest social structures are based on debt and credit, understood not as obligations to exchange gifts, but as relations in which the terms are all capable of being determined as monetary or quasi-monetary equivalents. Proceeding from that principle Nietzsche generates an account of morality, religion, and the state; and he also suggests that philosophy itself is to be understood in this perspective: "Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging—these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such*" (GM II, 8; 5, 306). Yet in the same text Nietzsche says in a number of ways that the creditor-debtor relation is equiprimordial with other social forms and institutions, claiming that it is "as old as the idea of 'legal subjects' [*Rechtssubjekte*]" (GM II, 4; 5, 298). Here Nietzsche could be construed as making a point similar to Mauss's claim that the very conception of personal and legal subjects is intimately tied to a quantifiable economy of equivalences; as Nietzsche argued in an earlier passage the subject is itself a fiction produced by *ressentiment* (GM I, 13; 5, 279). And in the text where Nietzsche speaks of "the earliest thinking of man" he quickly goes on to sketch a view according to which man *came to call himself man* (*manas*) or the evaluating one. All of these statements about the emergence of the creditor-debtor relationship, then, seem to allow for at least the possibility of another economy that precedes "legal subjects," "personal legal rights," and even man.

Remembering that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* itself is said to be the greatest gift ever given to mankind, and keeping in mind the ambivalence of the gift relation, we should be aware that the episodes of the book tend to be framed in a highly charged fashion that may volatilize what circulates through them. Consider the notorious chapter "On Little Women Young and Old." Readers who have taken seriously Nietzsche's curses upon the "idling reader" tend to note that the infamous imperative, "Are you going to women? Don't forget the whip!" is not exactly Zarathustra's own utterance and is even less directly attributable to Nietzsche. It is his citation of what the old

woman said to him, and it is delivered in the course of an exchange with a disciple. The framing shows that the stereotypical readings of the episode as crude misogyny may themselves be crude. But it ought to be recognized that both the entire scene and its framing conversation are forms of exchange.

One exchange, between Zarathustra and his disciple, reports another exchange with the little old woman. This is a somewhat ritualistic encounter reminiscent of the meeting with the hermit, except that there is an explicit frame story here that doubles and qualifies the story framed. Zarathustra steals through the twilight, with something concealed under his cloak. The disciple asks whether it is a treasure (*Schatz*) that has been given him, a child born to him, or a stolen object; the question is, To which of these three economic categories does it belong? (Let us not forget that a fine newborn child is a paradigmatic target of the evil eye; it is a natural economic good that must be concealed from the envious.) Zarathustra reveals that it is *both* a treasure and a child. (It's a little bundle, like a book perhaps. And a book, *this one*, is said to be the greatest gift.) How did he acquire it? He had a chance encounter with a little old woman who complains that Zarathustra speaks of everything under the sun except women. Like the hermit, she wants a gift and she recognizes, as perhaps the hermit does not, that Zarathustra's gifts are speeches. In this case Zarathustra does have something to give, although his alacrity in speaking is apparently prompted by the old woman's promise to forget quickly whatever she's told. And she recognizes the obligation to reciprocate, for she asks deliberately whether Zarathustra will accept in return (*nimm zum Dank*) "a little truth." This is considerate because, as we've seen, accepting a gift may be dangerous. But Zarathustra consents to receive it (one of only a very small number of gifts that he does receive) and so he becomes the possessor, for the time being, of the little truth/child/gift: "*Du gehst zu Frauen? Vergiss die Peitsche nicht!*" (Z 83; 4, 86). The saying or the whip itself might be considered an ambivalent gift, with both the bite of poison (like the German *Gift* or *Gabe*) and the capacity for giving pleasure. The personal address—"Du"—suggests that this is a gift for Zarathustra in particular, as does the isolated scene of the exchange. Yet

just as even the hermit cannot remain aloof from the circle of gifts and exchanges, so such secret gifts tend to become public currency, as Zarathustra passes the treasure on to his disciple and Nietzsche includes it as part of his own double-edged gift to humanity. What is described in Zarathustra's story to his disciple is not an episode of domination, but one of symbolic exchange. The exchange of gifts is of those preeminently symbolic things, words or discourses. Moreover, it is an exchange between genders, a matter that Nietzsche often suggests is both difficult and of the greatest importance. At the beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche compares the hostility and infrequent reconciliations of the Apollinian and Dionysian to the war of the sexes. In this context there is also something of a sexual difference between the two gods who give their names to these tendencies, because of Apollo's clearly masculine identity and Dionysus' more androgynous manifestations. Later on in the same text an uneasy truce between the two is described as marked by "a periodical exchange of gifts of esteem" (*periodischer Übersendung von Ehrengeschenken*) (BT 2; 1, 32).

We might compare this exchange of and about the gift with the one in the very next chapter, "On the Adder's Bite," in which Zarathustra first reverses the apparent value of snakebite by claiming that he's been given a gift and then humbles the adder by telling him "take back your poison (*Gift*). You are not rich enough to give it to me" (Z, 93; 4, 87). (Let us remember that the German *Gift* once had the sense of present as well as poison. Nietzsche may very well have been aware of the English homonym of *Gift*. The German translation of Emerson's essay "Gifts," from which Nietzsche quotes in *The Gay Science* is entitled "*Gaben*"; a *Gabe* is either a present or a dose, that is something possibly unpleasant and possibly administered against one's will.) The moral Zarathustra draws from this incident is this: "If you have an enemy, do not requite (*vergeltet*) him evil with good, for that would put him to shame. Rather prove that he did you some good." This teaching of new virtue and its many analogues should be contrasted with the utilitarian economies of the last man, who is a fantasy of and for those who think in the marketplace. They suggest that the dictum *Schätzen ist Schaffen* and Zarathustra's talk of the need to revalue are not