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CAN A GIFT BE GIVEN? PROLEGOMENA TO A FUTURE TRINITARIAN METAPHYSIC

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1. *Anthropological 'gift' and Phenomenological 'donation'*

In a sermon preached before Edward VI in 1549, Archbishop Hugh Latimer is recorded as speaking in the following terms, concerning magistrates who take bribes: 'Somewhat was given to them before, and they must *nedes* give somewhat again, for giffe-gaffe was a good fellow, this giffe-gaffe led them clene from justice. They follow gifts'.[1] These robust words record for us, in a derogatory fashion, some of the most archaic human wisdom. For 'giffe-gaffe' is personified mutual help, whose immemorial law is that what is given demands a gift in return, and whose equally immemorial prudence is that obedience to such law holds back the onset of litigation. However, the Bishop did not mention—as he assumed the prophetic mantle of the old covenant—that such prudence might not seem so far removed from the ideal counsels of *agape*: following the advice of Jesus and St. Paul, mutual forbearance and reconciliation through forgiveness—a certain offering of gifts, albeit not bribes (but can they be distinguished?)—ensures the perpetuation of *ecclesia*, the agapeic community, as a series of settlements out of court (Matthew 18: 15–17; 1 Cor. 6: 1–8).

Eventually, this relation between, on the one hand, primordial give and take, and on the other hand, the historical irruption of *agape*, will be my main concern. But, to begin with, I should like to consider the uses of the words 'gift', 'give' and 'present' in the English language of today and the past. The phrase 'giffe-gaffe' is equivalent to our 'give and take', and suggests that taking differs from giving merely by a single vowel. In an equally old variation, 'the giffs and the gaffes', meaning 'the gains and the losses', it is the gifts

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that are the takings. It is clear that there is some confusion here as to where giving ends and taking begins, and that what is crucial is not a distinction of actor and respondent, but the shuttling process of to-and-fro itself. This is confirmed by later uses of 'giff gaff' to mean uninhibited conversational interchange, or 'promiscuous talk'.[2] Even our current word 'give' can slide towards its opposite: 'to give way' means to provide a passage, to allow a certain reception of something, and to say of a tree that 'it gives' with the wind, or has 'give' in it, is to denote a pliability equivalent to a capacity to receive.

Thus the linguistic appearances suggest that to give something and to give something back are inseparable. Also that 'give' shifts ambiguously towards its opposite, 'take'. However, giving and gift are further involved, linguistically, in a double opposition according to whether one considers them subjectively—that is to say according to the relative positions of givers and receivers, and what passes between them—or, objectively—that is to say according to the character of the object or gesture given, and the mode of its being given. In the first case, the opposite of 'give' is 'take', and of 'a gift given', 'a gift received', but in the second case the opposite of 'gift' might be 'a blow' or 'poison'. For 'giving' is taken to signify a good transference, but there can also be *bad* transferences. Yet here again, the linguistic evidences suggest ambiguity: just as 'giff' could also mean 'takings', so also 'gif' could mean both gift and poison (the Greek and Latin *dosis* exhibits the same oscillation, and we can still receive a 'dose' of something either healing or harmful). And at a reflexively univocal remove from this alternative, 'giving' can assume a merely neutral inflection: one may give a blow as well as a present, and bad advice besides good.

The existence of the neutral inflection registers a third ambiguity: between a subjective and value-laden usage of gift words over-against a cold, neutral and impersonal one. 'Giving' and 'the given' may denote good intentions and intrinsically valuable objects, or they may indicate mere material transferences and brute objectivity. We say 'it is a given fact', 'One must start with the given' and so forth. Why should we say such things? Is it that our language is haunted by the praise of the gods or God, so that we secretly refer all that is to personal givers? Or is it that nothing simply and eternally *is*, but always first arrives or *arises*, if not through space, then at least through time. This would mean that the sense of something given is prior to the inference to (or intuition of) a giver, and might also lead us to suppose that objective arrival in time and objective exchange across space are all that occurs in supposedly 'human' gift exchange. This could well be taken to explain why a gift must come back (as an equal and opposite reaction to a merely material action), and why 'giving' can be indifferent to the qualities it bears. But whatever our decision here between a religious and an immanentist construal of gift-language outside the context of human interaction, it is arguable that 'giving' is just as 'transcendental' a term as 'being'. By this I mean that, in the same way all locutions include an implicit 'there is', so they

also include a 'something is given', something has arrived, something has been transferred, if only to me, the speaker: so if I were to say, 'I am looking at the clouds', this assumes that in some fashion the clouds have arrived at me, are there for me, are able to give themselves to me. If things could not give themselves to us, if the manifestation of light were not announced through vision, we should not be able to say that they *were* at all. It follows that it is redundant to assume that things are apart from their capacity to give themselves, or to be involved in some sort of spatial or temporal transference whereby they express themselves in and for something else, the 'recipient'. Not necessarily a conscious recipient, although to be conscious is not only the reflexivity of being—being aware, in *this* being, that there is being—but also the reflexivity of what gives—being aware, as *this* recipient, of the general rule of give and take.

This idea of a transcendental 'giving' in all things, construed albeit too firmly in terms of a philosophy of consciousness, was Edmund Husserl's reworking of Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, and for Husserl's pupil Heidegger, a more ontological variant of the same notion was confirmed by the German usage *es gibt* as an equivalent of our English 'there is'.[3] However, English also provides evidence of the same apparent mystification, for in old English the word *gif*, which as we have seen can indicate both gift and poison, was also sometimes used as a synonym for 'if'. 'Gif such and such happens': that is to say, *on condition that* such and such arises, is given to us. However, there is a much more obvious and contemporary indication of an intricate knot of involvement between being, time and giving in the word 'present'. The 'present' is the present moment, wherein alone things *are* as evidenced in their presence to us, but 'present' has also come to mean a gift, by way of a nominalization of the usage 'to present', meaning both 'to make present to', or 'bring into the presence of', in a ritual act before some seat of power, and also 'to offer', as in 'present with a gift upon your retirement'.[4] This oscillation arises because the present (thing or moment) always, despite its *stasis*, 'is' in virtue of its being given from elsewhere or from the past, which is equally the arrival ahead of itself of the future. The present *moment*, especially, can only be held *as* a gift, since it lies entirely *in* the gift of the passage of time and cannot be owned by a subject after it has been given to him (thereby obliterating its gratuitous origin). The moment never *stays* as present, even for a fleeting instance.

The appearances of the English language, therefore, suggest that the gift is, first of all, inseparable from exchange (giving from giving back) and also that it is caught up in three ambiguities: to give is also to take; a good gift is also a bad gift (benefit is also corruption); and finally 'the given' is both the result of a deliberate generous donation and a brute unyielding fact or principle, alien to will or affect.

But what *is* it that these appearances manifest? One can suggest two things. First of all, the traces of archaic cultural practices. Secondly, aspects

of a universal human condition. These two *res*, the one historical, and the other ontological, are hard to separate and the question of their possible separability or otherwise is part of what is at issue in this paper. Nevertheless, I shall proceed initially by trying to isolate the first category. I said 'traces of archaic cultural practices'. It is significant that the link of gift with exchange, and the three ambiguities surrounding 'gift' and 'giving' are more marked in *older* English usage. Also that the process of 'giff-gaff', especially as denoting close conversation between strangers, gradually came to assume disreputable overtones of idle chatter, and slangy, blasphemous talk. Think of our phrases 'he committed a gaff', or 'blow the gaff' or 'old gaffer'. It seems that a gift came to be synonymous with blunder, foolish candour and senility. Why should this be so? Well, it is significant that giff-gaff between *strangers* in *public* should be frowned upon. For here is a mode of *gift-giving* between strangers in public. From a modern perspective, this does indeed amount to a kind of category confusion. Our society makes a sharp distinction between legal contract on the one hand, and gift on the other hand, as being essentially a 'free gift' which never *has* to be given or received, since it is by definition not subject to prior agreement. The 'non-compulsory' character of the modern gift extends also to the fact that it does not expect a return-gift, is unaffected in its gift-character by the gratitude or lack of it on the part of the recipient, and is sufficiently definable as a gift according to these conditions of 'free givenness', in complete indifference to *the content* of the gift. A gift may be of anything: what matters, as in the case of modern as opposed to ancient liberty, is correct intention and lack of constraint in the circumstances surrounding the act.[5] One might describe such a characterization of the gift as both 'formalist' and 'unilateral' (as opposed to a demanded reciprocity). Obviously this cleavage between gift and contract, which is itself enshrined within the contracted bonds of law, embodies a relatively strong modern distinction between the private and public spheres of life.

Nevertheless, even within our society, it is not clear that the distinction easily holds, or that we are really sure what a gift is. To take the question of the distinction first: many practices still fall ambiguously between gift and contract. Think of retirement presents, business lunches, and unrecorded offerings which oil the wheels of commerce. Think also of the formalities and courtesies which surround and support pragmatic activities which people contract into for their private benefit. Oxford and Cambridge colleges still deck out education in an elaborate paraphernalia of ritual offerings, whose content stretches from nominal titles to tangible food and drink (which is even received from forefathers in return for their commemoration in certain annual feasts). Or one might cite the practice of 'tipping'. This has the appearance of free-gift, yet is often expected, and certainly occurs within a context of market-exchange. Is this merely a species of deception, a payment in disguise? Perhaps not quite, since tipping is not so bound by rules as legally enforceable payment. There may, indeed, exist norms concerning what

would be an appropriate tip, but one can also tip more generously if one feels one has been especially well-treated, or one is merely in a benevolent mood. Also, tipping involves an element of risk, of right calculation in particular circumstances: too small a tip may tip gift into insult, too large a tip expose one to ridicule as a profligate. And is too small a gift received as an insult still, objectively, a gift, provided it was intended to be such?

Tipping, like the rituals of Oxbridge Colleges, might be dismissed as an archaic survival, and so too might the art of conversation, yet it persists tenaciously. To converse with a stranger or with someone in a formal context is still to engage in an exchange of little verbal offerings that are not primarily meant to inform or to achieve something. They are, at once, essentially decorative, and yet still regarded as essential for social bonding. Thus if one says, in many contexts, 'it's cold for the time of year', this is not to give information, nor even to express one's feelings, but to open or continue negotiations. Such a little present expects something equally gratuitous (or apparently gratuitous, because it is, after all, demanded) to be returned. It anticipates 'Yes, isn't it' and not 'Well actually no, statistics show ...'.

In all of these instances there appears to occur something not quite reducible to absolute obligation (not even moral, besides legal obligation) and therefore to do with gift, yet in a fashion which seems to violate the contemporary understanding of gift in a strictly formalist and unilateral manner as non-compulsory for donor or donee, as not expecting a return, and as indifferent to its own content.

It is possible, then, that the distinction between gift and contract will not so easily hold. However, if certain public activities are still contaminated by the supposedly 'private' grammar of giving, it is inversely the case that free, private, giving is secretly pervaded by hidden contract and obligation. This suggests not merely that it is hard to distinguish gift from contract, but even that a gift cannot be given at all. Why should such a dire consequence follow? Well first of all, generosity is taken for a virtue, and therefore in some sense an obligation. It is the same case here as with the Christian command to love: love is something spontaneous, elicited from us rather than willed by us, and yet for all that, the subject of a strange commandment.[6] An obligation to give appears puzzling: if we *should* be generous, then this is because we *owe* something, perhaps an infinite something, to others—the poor, maybe, our neighbours, or else future generations. One might, indeed, suddenly give a lot of money to a body with which one was not particularly linked, and owed nothing special as an individual: the National Trust, for example.[7] And yet such a body might be regarded as a *suitable* recipient. For it might be thought that we all in Britain in a sense owe part of our enjoyment of the environment of this country to this body, and also that it holds in trust our own collective obligation to future generations. There *is* therefore already a double and doubly contractual relation of this individual to this body.

One may contrast such a situation with an entirely random act of charity, for example a handing-over of a large bag containing bank notes to anyone in the street (anyone save one who appeared poor, since the poor are related to us all via the credit of our guilt).[8] Such an act would appear quixotic rather than straightforwardly generous, as absurd as that randomness and motiveless murder which once so preoccupied intellectuals. It could, nonetheless, be objected here that such an action might authenticate the giver as a 'holy fool'.[9] However, this exception still proves the rule, for the action remains crazy at a purely human level and only acquires sense when it is taken for a simulacrum of the contradictory divine wisdom: 'The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him' (1 Cor. 2: 14; and see 1 Cor. 1: 22–2: 13). First of all, God *is* equally related to all, so that to this degree an absurd miming of divine action can be brought back within the normal human logic of gift which assumes (as I have just tried to demonstrate) some prior relation to the recipient (or at least a simultaneous relation, as when one gives in order to *establish* a relationship). Secondly, in accordance with a higher, foolish wisdom which does appear to diverge from this logic, God's original, creative donation *is* a kind of throwing away, or pointless excess. But *not* such that it is a gift to 'anyone' (who happens to be there, 'in the street'); rather, in order that there *be* an anyone at all, to receive. Whether or not this renders the divine gift entirely prior to reciprocity, and free of all taint of contract, will be considered later.

But already it has been established that human generosity belongs within the context of prior attachments, or at the very least the *making* of such attachments. This suggests at once that a reflection upon erotic love is not irrelevant to an elucidation of agapeic donation. We have inherited a contrast between *agape*, a 'giving' love, and *eros*, a 'desiring' love, but human erotic attachments are only sustained by the incessant exchange of gifts, which are always tokens of further, future gifts, such that desire is never fulfilled as possession, for a constitutive lack in desire will always prove its own thwarting. If desire does know moments of fulfilment, then this is in the coincidence of giving and giving back. As against a logic which would associate a purity of love with unilateral action, it seems not insignificant that within romantic love an asymmetry of giving, where only one partner gives presents and favours, suggests not at all freedom and gratuitousness, but rather an obsessive admiration that subsists only at a wilfully melancholic distance, or still worse a purchase of sexual satisfaction, and in either case the slide of desire towards one-sided private possession. Giving here is most free where it is *yet* most bound, most mutual and most reciprocally demanded. The logic of divine *agape* plays above such play, yet this height must not be conceived in a fashion that renders it in fact more base, more mean and solipsistic, in the name of apparent 'self-sacrifice'.

A parallel truth emerges from the intra-familial context. Giving within families would seem not freedom but folly were it too unilateral: the parents

who showered gifts on their children expecting absolutely nothing in return by way of gratitude, a good use of their possessions, opportunities and education, would indeed give an entirely poisoned gift, a 'gift' of spoliation. Within families, giving is 'good' somewhat to the degree that it *respects* various obligations, including expectation of return, use made of the gift to ensure that it *remains* a gift (even if the use to be made of a gift can never be *precisely* commanded without destroying its gift character[10]), and appropriateness in content of the gift.

And in general it seems that a good, a sensible gift, always does receive something back: if not the gratitude of another and delight in her pleasure, plus the sense that we have benefitted her, then at least the self-awareness that we have sought to do so, such that the thwarting of the gift is outside our control, and need not deprive us of our 'present' status of generosity of heart. This, at least, comes back to us, as a compensation for what *should* return.

However, if gifts are only good according to the measure of concealed moral contracts, debts and obligations, what is a gift after all? What distinguishes it from the fulfilling, albeit the just fulfilling, of a binding contract? As Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out, there are only two features which can really distinguish a gift, and these do not at all correspond to a formalist and universal definition.[11] First of all there must be (usually) delay of return. To give a return gift straightaway, to have people back to dinner the very next day, implies a *lack* of gratitude, a desire to discharge a *debt* as soon as possible. Secondly (and again, *almost* always)[12] the gift given back must be different, and although perhaps equivalent, not obviously equivalent. Otherwise, one is faced, of course, with an evident insult. Therefore, if a gift can be given at all, it must be within the *logos* or measure of a necessary *delay* (whose term is indeterminate, though not infinite) and of *non-identical repetition* between gift and counter-gift. To the latter belongs also that incomplete prescription as to the use to be made of a gift already mentioned, since correct use of a gift always involves in some sense a 'giving back', if not to the individual donor then at least to the wider social forces which that individual represents, such that 'return' can occur by way of 'a giving in turn', or a 'passing on' of the original gesture. Non-identical repetition, therefore, includes not only the return of an equivalent but different gift, but also a non-exact *mimesis* (but therefore all the more genuinely exact) of the first gesture in unpredictably different circumstances, at unpredictable times and to unpredictably various recipients. This association of gift with non-identical repetition correlates with the way in which, for oral/gift cultures, a story is not usually related to an audience in exactly the same form in which it was received, yet remains 'the same' story.

Nonetheless the suspicion arises that these phenomena merely conceal from view a brute contractual reality, that 'giving' is a deceitful appearance disguising demands arising from quasi-legal agreements, which themselves

are grounded in various exercises of coercive power. If this suspicion is to be expelled, then clearly it cannot be in terms of defending the pure 'free gift' defined over-against contract, within the terms of the genus 'negative liberty' which contains them both. For it turns out, as has been shown, that the freest gift is still 'contaminated' by contract. Moreover, both Georges Davy and Marcel Mauss themselves saw gift exchange as the first *origin* of contract, the first, but always already intruded breach—involving a risk-laden exchange—in the seamless web of inter-familial 'status'. Indeed, Mauss explicitly traces the *judicial formalism* of Roman law, enshrined in the contractual *nexum*, 'from things as much as from men', that is to say from the quasi-magical principle of the inalienability of gift.[13] Here, in a certain sense, there is a continuity between an *antique* egoism of possession and *antique* rigidity of binding law and the more extreme modern variants of the same phenomena. Therefore the only way to save the appearance of the gift would be to discover, after all, some logic in the supposed confusion between gift and contract as still traceable in many public practices. One would have to be able to argue that while gift-exchange is contractual, it nonetheless preserves an element of gratuity irreducible to contract, or rather rendering contract something other than contract, though other, also, than the 'free gift'. This logic must involve, as its essential elements, delay and non-identical repetition, and it must be established that these are not merely species of collective self-deception.

If there is such deception, then its grip is well-nigh universal. It increases as one travels south to the Mediterranean, and still further when one crosses to North Africa.[14] Yet further still if one travels backwards in time. The work of Malinowski and Mauss earlier this century established that so-called archaic or primitive economies are in the main characterized not, as had been assumed ever since classical times by *barter*, but by gift-exchange.[15] Barter can be regarded as a highly rational, purely material and economic process, a matter of convenience which smoothly gives way to the higher convenience of money. But to rely, for many of the essentials of market exchange, on the generosity of others, seems by comparison highly exotic and bizarre. It is only comprehensible if one realizes that such exchanges were by no means purely 'economic' in our sense. They could be of virtually everything: of women, signs, time and festivals as well as goods, and often of any one of these for any other one. Political and familial alliances, as well as economic debts, were contracted through such transactions. In addition, the individual pursued through gift-exchange not simply wealth, or the goods he wanted, but the prestige and honour of a giver, of 'a magnanimous man' to use the term of Aristotle. Such honour and prestige was of the essence of power.

In the case of the archaic societies described by Malinowski and Mauss, one finds a great accentuation of all the traits of gift-exchange which survive spasmodically in our society: *obligation* to give, obligation *to receive*, and

obligation *to give back*. However, in addition to this threefold requirement appears sometimes a fourth one at once more alien, and yet eerily familiar. In certain archaic cultures there is an obligation *to give back more*. In societies where there is no written contract, and no absolute private property, since one can only own things in the mode of continuously re-distributing them, there is, apparently, a form of credit and usury: a mode of compensation to the giver for the *time* of his deprivation, of his not having what he has given. However, in contradiction to Mauss and Malinowski, anthropologists have since discovered that this appearance is deceptive: the 'extra' given back is not an interest due, but rather the result of an obligation to be always more generous. Nonetheless, this categorical imperative is at the same time often pursued in the context of competition between rivals ('big men') as a matter of self-interest which seeks to ensure that the out-given other remains more in your debt than you are in his.[16] The existence of *this* form of 'interest' betrays the fact that in some archaic societies a self-interest not totally dissimilar to capitalist self-interest is manifest. One gives, not out of altruism, but to be given more: *do ut des*. Not *totally* dissimilar, but nonetheless different, since the 'more' consists in accumulated honour and prestige, and not in wealth. In rendering the other indebted through your excessive gift you do not, as in a modern market relationship, ensure the alienation from yourself of your debtor, who does his best to avoid you, but rather his continuing bondage of devotion and respect towards you.

Given (to us) this appearance of 'archaic' (or more accurately, 'local') societies, the suspicion arises that such societies themselves scarcely pretend to practice generosity, and one may well wonder about the rendering by anthropologists of so many different words in different tongues as 'gifts'. Nevertheless, these peoples do exchange things with all the trappings of what we should take to be presentations and donations. And it seems that rampant egocentricity is but one aspect of such societies. Intra-familial as opposed to cross-clan exchanges usually seek balance rather than imbalance, and the more one discovers a quasi-feudal chief or king who heads a state rather than a 'big man' dominating kinship groups, the more exchanges are 'tributary' in character. This means that the chief or king who receives a surplus is thereby rendered more powerful, not less, although to preserve this power he must repay his debt to the community by expending the surplus in a festive, sacrificial manner, not by re-investing it in production. Tributary exchanges, though linked to hierarchy, also establish a kind of reciprocal balance between ruler and ruled.[17] But it is also the case, even for 'big man' societies, that possessions must keep moving to bind society together, because they are one locus of the social bond itself. Thus they are often treated as fetishes, as a kind of quasi-money imbued with a power which will visit doom upon the non-giver and gifts are always regarded as imbued with the *persona* of the giver, as ultimately inalienable from him and bound one day to return.[18] Society is envisaged as one organism on which all

depend, whose destiny is tied to the exchange of *these particular* sacred things.

Here one sees a difference from ourselves, who have entered further into abstraction, such that possessions and money have become alienable from their owners and anything may serve as a means of exchange, most commonly the purest abstraction of 'nothing' which is the monetary token (and for that reason the *most compelling* fetish, as Marx realised). The binding function of the archaic gift, implied in its aspect of balanced reciprocation, its non-alienability from the giver, and its associated particularity of content does, perhaps, go some way to differentiate it from contract. This is in addition to the phenomena of delay and non-identical repetition, still to be examined. A third possible difference concerns the fact that despite the obligations to give, receive and return, these rules can be bent, and one can even say (as one cannot for modern legality) that the bending is *part* of the rules. For while in general one should engage in gift exchange, one can refrain from all these obligations in order to insult, which in certain instances may be strategically prudent. One *plays* with the rules, and nowhere more so than when one gives so much that the equivalent can never be returned, and the receiver becomes thereby enslaved: this violates a sub-category of the duty to receive, namely the duty to give in such a fashion that one expects to receive in return.[19]

Is it possible, then, to defend the integrity of gift-exchange on the grounds of concern for balanced reciprocity and organic coherence, together with the role of delay plus non-identical repetition and the strategic exploitation of the rules? Marcel Mauss, in 1925, certainly thought so, and argued that archaic societies with 'good faith' or gift economies revealed *universal* laws of human social solidarity, characterized by a kind of Aristotelean mean between an excess of generosity and an excess of self-interest (and between an excess of obligation and an excess of freedom).[20] However, Mauss does at times sound somewhat confused: on the one hand these societies are relevant to us because they *do* recognize credit and self-interest, and yet manage to suffuse these things with generosity—a benign and recommended category confusion. On the other hand they are held to have obscured and held back a supposedly logical, universal and essentially necessary *distinction* of categories or delimitation of spheres: between the economic and the ritual-symbolic on the one hand, and between 'personal' rights and 'real' contractual rights on the other.[21] How can gift-exchange be at once the golden mean and at the same time something destined to be put into its proper place by contract? When Mauss proposes an extension of gift-exchange in our own culture, he demands that industry and commerce be more governed by a 'professional' ethos still characterizing medicine and education, such that one treats the products of people's labour as their (in some measure) inalienable gifts, and so grants them in return not only a wage which 'purchases' their labour, but counter-gifts of support for their whole persons and way of life. And yet, Marcel Mauss, a somewhat 'corporatist' (in the pre World War II sense)

social democrat seems to think that such real interpersonal relation between capitalist and worker can be grafted onto arrangements which remain, in their economic logic, sheerly contractualist.[22]

By contrast to such attractive obscurity, two more recent authors have been sceptical of the integrity of gift-exchange. First of all, the Marxist Pierre Bourdieu, argues that, while the donor would have no power over the donee if they did not both *believe* in the reality of gift-exchange—if, in other words, the donee did not feel truly grateful to the donor, nonetheless it is only the use of delay and slight variance in the content of the gift, which hides from view what is at bottom a nakedly contractual and usurious reality.[23] For Bourdieu, what is going on is a massive pretence by all parties (not, of course, a deliberate or conscious one) that it is not a purely economic, material and self-interested force which drives the system. The pretence conceals the coercion at work, and reconciles all to such coercion. However, the problem with Bourdieu's claim is that it assumes, without warrant, that economic self-interest in a sense only defined and produced *by capitalism*, is everywhere fundamental. Why should not honour and (eternal) reputation as 'a strong man' able to give abundantly be as acutely sought after as wealth, which after all is subject to the Midas-contradiction of a pointless hoarding? A concomitant of Bourdieu's position is that the incessantly ritual element of good-faith economies, which includes as one crucial aspect the offerings of gifts 'sacrificed' to ancestors and gods (who are a crucial part of the cycle) is so much waste of effort.[24] However, this 'waste' is only defined as such in relation to the assumption of the primacy of abstract accumulation of wealth or of 'material' self-interest, whereas for an archaic perspective such 'accumulation' might itself appear as the wasted effort to deny that *all* effort is destined merely (or gloriously, if there are sacred recipients) to be expended.[25] For local societies, joy in festive giving, delivering at once a sense of power and feeling of connectedness with others, may be itself the final goal. However, Bourdieu does show that the dominance of 'practice', or of tactical manipulation of the rules in such societies, cannot be cited as proof of the irreducibility of gift. The tactics depend upon the use of delay (for example, not giving one's daughter to a suitor *too soon*, though one knows one will do so eventually, in order to maximize a period of 'hold' over him) and of non-identical repetition largely reducible to quantitative outbidding. If gifts are only given in order to render indebted, to ensure a return of honour, and if debt drives the whole system to ensure continued exact compliance with what has been laid down, marked out by the powerful, both dead and living, then there can be, *we* must judge, no real gift.[26] There only *can be* gift if delay and non-identical repetition can be shown to be in principle irreducible to the operation of such tactics, to the ensuring of the primacy of debt, and the always identical marks of honour.

For a second author, Jacques Derrida, also, gift-exchange is incoherent.[27] But not (or not simply) on Marxist grounds, rather on the philosophical

ground (*the* philosophical ground?) that any notion of gift is self-refuting. However, the archaic bringing of gift into conjunction with *every res* is, for Derrida, in a way more coherent than imagining there to be a domain of pure gift. This is for the reason that, though a gift cannot *be*, we cannot elide the human *desire* to give, that there *should* be a gift. Such desire is constitutive of our humanity and ensures that there will always be an appearance of gift. It is at once the Kantian metaphysical transgression of the limits of what is theoretically knowable (a transgression which, for Kant, cannot be avoided) and at the same time the aim for pure freedom, untainted disinterestedness, of Kantian practical reason. For Derrida, the desire to give is the ethical impulse as such. But since it is *also* the transgressive metaphysical impulse, it cannot ever be realized in any act. It cannot *be*. Explication of the illusory, metaphysical character of the impulse to give involves showing, in the fashion I have already undertaken, the contamination of every gift by interested contract. Derrida takes an extreme line here: not simply gratutide for a gift on the part of a recipient, but even acknowledgment of the gift cancels the gift by rewarding the giver with the knowledge that he is a giver. Furthermore, if a giver *alone* knows he is giving the rewards himself, he still represents himself to himself as a benefactor, and so returns himself to himself. Although this return occurs at a 'meta-level' of reflection, disinterested giving only 'recommends' itself *within* the grammar of such reflection, which like any grammar is a fundamentally public property, a currency always already in circulation. The 'recommendation' negates itself by securing the circle of the same, self-affirming 'Hegelian' subject, whereas for there to be a pure free gift, there would have to be no donating subject, no receiving subject, and no gift-object transferred. A true gift would be from no-one, to no-one and of nothing. But this gift cannot *be* given, since subject and object exhaust the whole of ontological reality. Furthermore, the idea of a gift only arises at all as an intention *of* a subject, so that not only must a gift be without subject or object—which is impossible—but even the conceptual horizon of this impossibility is contradictory, since it rises out of a ground—the subject—which simultaneously negates it. A gift both requires, and seeks to escape from, a giver. Therefore there is no gift and not even a *meaning* for 'gift'.

But this does not at all mean, for Derrida, that it is pointless to talk about gifts and giving. On the contrary, he now talks of little else, since he contends that it is all there is to talk of. This is not precisely because gift operates as a regulative horizon for ontological statements, since we have just seen that even the meaning of 'gift' is incoherent. Rather, if the notion of gift is in some fashion regulative, it is as a kind of unmeaning which must guide all our (ontological) meaning. This works in the following way: not only is it the case that a gift is not and cannot be, it is also true that 'a present' in the sense of a present moment is not, since the present moment has always vanished as soon as it has arrived. But if the present is not, since Being is

ineradicably linked to the notion of presence, Being itself is instantly dissolved into nothingness and unmeaning. The non-being and non-logic which afflicts the gift affects also Being itself, which opens the way to allowing that language might have to be as much about gift, as about what is. We are returned to the Heideggerean *es gibt*, and the idea that things are to the extent that they give themselves. For Derrida, this means that a present is given since it also is not, but is perpetually in the gift of the passage of time which never becomes present, and so is itself (as for Heidegger)[28] nothing. Hence although the gift is impossible even to be thought, this is one and the same with the impossibility that wounds Being and time themselves, though these remain all that we *can* think. Giving becomes as real and unreal as being, since it is identical with the 'passing away' of time (Heidegger).[29] This passage is (is not) alone the true gift, since it is alone unilateral, alone not given back, alone outside the expectation of reciprocity, alone given by no-one without self-congratulation, alone absolutely indifferent to the content of what it gives. In some strange sense the passing away of time is for Derrida equivalent to the Platonic good, to the ethical.[30] And yet not quite, for the ethical involves a human intention towards time, a human attempt *to give* time, since Derrida has learnt from Mauss that giving requires delays and therefore must be (at least) a gift of time, an indeterminate interval during which nothing is owed. But for Derrida the pure gift must be only of time, since only time, as has been seen, fulfils the necessary conditions of purity. The true gift of time is a non-identical repetition which can never actually occur, since with its occurrence would arise a definable donor and donee, locked out of time in a 'present' exchange within the spatial *agora*. Here, in order 'to be', past and future are contractually traded off against each other.

In this way, for Derrida, there is no human gift, while to be human is to be haunted by the possibility of giving the real gift which cannot be given, since it resides in an inaccessible and non-existent impersonality which is equally a non-objectivity. All of the ontic, both subject and object, is 'nihilated' in the ontological passage of time, which in turn nihilates itself in the always necessarily recurring though illusory space of subjects and objects, locked in never-completed exchange, subject to never-repaid debts.

Against both Derrida and Bourdieu, is it possible to defend exchange, and so the reality of the gift? I would like to consider how this might be undertaken. My reflections will run in the direction of suggesting that one can defend gift as delay and non-identical repetition only by purging it of all archaic agonistic components. I venture to suggest that this possibility or actuality—purified gift-exchange—and *not* 'pure gift' is what Christian *agape* claims to be. And that the purified gift-exchange, unlike the pure gift, remains within the bounds of the ontological, which is to say the metaphysical. Just as Christianity transforms but does not suppress our 'given' social nature which is exchangist, so also Christian theology transforms,

utterly appropriates to itself the ontological task, but does not abandon it in suspension, by elevating itself above it (in a manner that would be both like and unlike Derrida's positive nihilism) in the name of a purely unilateral (and univocal) gift prior to that circular reciprocity which is, indeed, consequent upon *esse*.

As a first consideration, I would suggest that modern purism about the gift, which renders it unilateral, is in part the child of *one* theological strand in thinking about *agape* which has sought to be over-rigorous in a self-defeating fashion.[31] This rigour takes the form of disassociating *agape* in turn from the giver's own happiness or well-being, then from *eros* or any kind of desire to be *with* the recipient of your love, then from justice or 'giving the other his due' (thereby rendering forgiveness a mere inaugural gesture, rather than a substitutionary act of 'giving-for' as its Christic model and ground of possibility would suggest) and finally from power, or the inescapable persuasion of the other involved in every offering. The trouble with such rigour, unbiblical for all that it seeks to be super-biblical, is that extreme 'disinterest' in one's activity, though it can only be exercised by a subject, tends also to a suicidally sacrificial will against oneself. That is to say, it tends ineradicably to depersonalize or devolve into a will to be a fully usable object. Thus Georges Bataille, pursuing, albeit perversely, such rigour, argues that atheism is more religious than religion, since a truly indifferent and disinterested sacrificial offering would be the will to self-disintegration towards nothing, with no morally ruinous compensatory gain from divine union.[32]

As a second consideration, I would suggest that (indeterminate though not infinite) delay and non-identical repetition need not be functions of an obfuscatory and self-serving strategy. They might otherwise be construed in terms of the necessarily creative self-expression of the genuine giver.[33] Also, they might be construed as a requisite *attention* to the other, her character, situation and mood, such that we know how to surprise and not to annoy. As regards the Derridean notion that 'rewards' to self intrinsic to giving cancel the gift, this seems allied to the questionable Kantian understanding of the goodness of the gift as residing in purity of will or motivation. Whereas, if a gift is first and foremost a *suitable* gift (and suitability might include scope for unexpected use by the donee), then the act of giving is not necessarily ruined by imperfect intention. Moreover, one can enjoy giving, not only in the mode of self-congratulation, but also as a kind of *ecstasis*, or continuation of oneself out of oneself. Likewise, the wanting and even the demanding to receive back (in some fashion) may be a recognition of ineradicable connection with others and a desire for its furtherance. Here resides a self-affirmation that is also a self-displacement, since it seeks to resituate self through the address of others towards me. Jean-Luc Marion has rightly argued that to receive the *other* in receiving his gift demands that the *distance* of the other remains in place—to try to possess the other and his

gifts, to receive them as exactly due rewards, or as things we do not need *to go on* receiving, would be simply to obliterate them.[34] In this notion of 'gift as distance' therefore, which insists that the gift only remains a gift if it persists in the mode of transference, and consequently goes on being given through *time*, we are provided with a third consideration (besides those of *eros* and self-expression) which might enable the rescue of delay and repetition on behalf of gift. Marion's explication of this strategy will now be given a short examination.

2. *Marion's Gift of Distance: A Critique*

From my perspective, Marion is positioned uneasily between Derrida's nihilistic *agape* and a proposed construal (not yet fully articulated) of *agape* as purified gift-exchange. The notion of a gift which is only a gift in so far as it continues to arrive from the other, which 'is' in that distance could very well be aligned with the archaic notion of the belonging of the gift perpetually to the giver, or the 'non-alienability' of the gift, which is not our modern thing, a commodity, and therefore can come back to the giver in a same-but-different form.[35] Concomitantly, it could also be aligned with the archaic notion that in receiving a gift one receives the giver himself in a concrete form, since objects are construed 'personally' as aspects of their owners, just as persons are construed 'objectively', as exhaustively what 'gives' to the community. In advocating and not just regarding such an intermingling of subject and object, Mauss wrote a meditation against Descartes. Yet by comparison, Marion offers us a still-Cartesian gift after all, since his merging of object with subject is one-sided, unilateral: it is not equally a merging of subject with object. Hence Marion's gift is *only* of the subjective other, *only* of distance and not of the transference and content-filled 'in-between' which alone *makes* that distance: 'what distance gives consists in the gap itself'.[36] To be given *only* what is held at a distance is to be given ... nothing.

That Marion's 'distance' reduces to such an abyss is arguable from two indications. First, it is indicated by his treatment of the icon, in which the icon escapes the status of idol because it gazes back at us in an unbreakable distance. One may legitimately ask why this is not itself to idolize God as *exactly like* another subject, locked with us in the same *milieu* of finite being.[37] Secondly, it is indicated by his treatment of the *topos* of 'vanity'. The vanity of the world, as he rightly says, consists in the futility of Being when it is not apprehended as the gift of God. He compares this with objects and places associated with a love affair—outside the light of that association, they incite only *ennui*.[38] But here he insists that *any* objects, any place will do; it is not Being and its content which counts, but the radiance of love, its attitude thrown upon them. And to this it must be objected, that Marion can only be speaking of a light romance, indifferent not only to its specific tokens, but

also to the very object of its affections. For which human person could possibly become a candidate for *elective* love outside her instantiation in a thousand and one external, objective associations? What 'belongs' to a subject is as much what she has loved, preferred, spoken (and perhaps all these things 'with' her lover) as her own body and personality—or rather, the former things *are* also her body and personality. By analogy, the vanity of the world outside the light of divine grace is not a thesis concerning an ultimate indifference to the world's content. To the contrary, the idea of such indifference belongs to vain illusion, for the world seen in the light of divine grace is the world seen as that light, as prismatic refraction into *these specific* colours, which decomposition is included within the Trinity, within the efflorescence of the *Logos* itself.[39] Here the giver is recognized as good, not simply because he has gratuitously given, but because what he gives constitutes a language of gratuity in so far as it affords us 'good', attractive opportunities, harmonious patterns which allow and do not inhibit our innovative, distinctive action. Therefore if it is true, as Marion stresses, that a gift abides only in distance, it is equally true that if a gift is to pass, and not rather to be endlessly expected, the giver abides only in the specific form, measure and character of this distance. And such specificity there must always be, for even in the case of our infinite distance from God, we ourselves exist in some specific measure of such distance, albeit never completed, never fully apprehended.

Marion's divine giving, which 'gives' being and so is fundamentally indifferent to it, for it does not, as free, 'have' to be,[40] remains thereby indifferent also to the content of its gift, since it does not give out of an infinite plenitude of existing possession, albeit possession always already given (from the Father to the Son) but rather gives only giving, the pure gesture. One might well ask: what beneficence is this, other than an empty will to beneficence, indistinguishable from Derrida's nihilistic gift which is the empty and disinterested passage of time? And just as Marion's divine gift is in this aspect a hypostasization of a modern, free, post-Cartesian, capitalist and 'pure' gift, and thereby 'indifferent to content', so it is also (as a concomitant) relatively indifferent to counter-gift, or to relation and reciprocity. Of course in a large measure Marion is here correct: counter-gift cannot possibly be predicated of God, since there is nothing extra to God that *could* return to him. God gives 'to' no-one, but creates all *ex nihilo*, causes all by his grace, and goes on giving despite all our refusals. Here, one might suggest, is the exemplary purity of gift, whose absolute gratuity and spontaneity removes it from all taint of exchange. However, one might also suggest that this absolute degree of gratuity involves also an extreme pitch of exchange. And Marion himself grasps this implication: 'The giving traverses distance by not ceasing to send the given back to the giver'; 'the self-withdrawal of the giver in the gift may be read on the gift, in the very fact that it refers back absolutely to the giver'; 'The gift gives the giver to be seen, in repeating the

gift backwards'; 'God requires receiving the gift—and since the gift occurs only in distance—returning it'.[41]

One can explicate this coincidence of absolute gratuity with absolute exchange in the following manner. In the usual situation of gift giving, the gift must pass across a 'neutral' territory, belonging neither to donor nor donee. Although the gift is intended to pass through this terrain, its neutrality nevertheless helps to secure the freedom of the gift, since if the gift is refused it will remain there, abandoned, unless it is returned to the sender or retrieved by him. If this happens, even the minimum degree of exchange, manifest in the 'return' made by gratitude, will be thwarted. Yet in the case of the divine gift, none of this applies. For the very reason that it is a gift to no-one, but rather establishes creatures *as* themselves gifts, the divine gift passes across no neutral abyss, no interval of uncertainty during which one waits, with bated breath, to see if the destiny of a gift will be realised. Instead, divine giving occurs *inexorably*, and this means that a return is inevitably made, for since the creature's very being resides in its reception of itself as a gift, the gift is, in itself, the gift of a return—in the specifically human instance, of 'such a heart whose pulse may be Thy praise'.[42] Not, of course, a return that God receives as a need, since he is replete (Romans 11:35), but a return that constitutes the creature itself, and which God receives by grace: 'Not that thou hast not still above/Much better tunes than groans can make,/But that these country-aires Thy love/Did take'.[43] The Creature only is, as manifesting the divine glory, as acknowledging its own nullity and reflected brilliance. To be, it entirely honours God, which means it returns to him an unlimited, never paid-back debt. Of course, in the case of *free* creatures, this return may not be made, but as we know, such non-return is highly paradoxical and does *not*, as non-return of human gifts might, augment the status of free creatures as potential recipients, as people requiring a better honouring and placating. On the contrary, it closes *off* the possibility of any further reception, whether from God or from other creatures. For the sinful self is left merely with the empty gesture of freedom, an absolute control over its own illusory and contentless stability, and robbed of the freedom to do this or that, which is inseparable from a freedom *for* this or that, involving receptivity. To refuse Being as a gift is to refuse the condition of all receptivity as such, and turns out to mean a refusal of the gift of Being. In such circumstances, God does indeed continue to give, and it is as if, after all, the divine gift hovers in the desert. However, such a situation is a contradiction for God, only resolved when this refusal itself is manifest as inexorable gift and infinite return. Since human refusal forecloses its ontic status as receptacle, consigning it to nothingness, it cannot for itself receive even its own refusal, which is to say, receive its meaning as utter alienation from God, the source of all that is. Only God himself can receive this refusal, which he does, on the cross, so manifesting the refusal as, after all, the reception of a gift. Here, however, infinite return is realized as perfect return,

God's return of himself to himself, and it is disclosed to us that the divine created gift, which realizes an inexorable return, is itself grounded in an intra-divine love which is relation and exchange as much as it is gift.

However, with respect to the divine incarnation, there is a further point to be made which indicates Marion's only partial recognition of the exchangist character of the divine gift. Following the gospels, it would be incorrect to say that God *first of all* fully receives our refusal on the cross and *then* offers to us this reception. On the contrary, he first of all makes to us the offering of a man making an infinite and complete return to God, and it is this which we inevitably, as sinners, refuse. And *yet* the countervailing movement of a faithful, ecclesial reception of God's offer—Christ's person and finally his suffering—commences as soon as Christ commences, and accompanies him throughout his path. Otherwise there would remain no trace of him in human records at all. Most remarkably, Luke's birth narrative insists that a free reception of Christ was a condition of this gift being given from the very outset. Hence, not only does Christ cancel sin in us, he arrives to us, and can only arrive at all by immediately cancelling sin in us. Mary's praise already cancels sin since it is able to speak *the logos* into being. Of course this is all under grace, and Mary's *fiat* is from that perspective inexorable, but nevertheless creation is restored, given back to us, in the same manner that it was first given to us in a gift that is (inexorably) our free reception and infinite return of the gift.

It follows that one must conclude that Marion's raising of the text, 'he came to his own but his own received him not' to a hermeneutically pivotal position which establishes that the divine gift is indifferent to reception, ignores the hermeneutic priority of the *necessary* reception of Christ by Israel in the person of Mary.[44] Without this reception, without this 'reciprocity', the gift would be so thwarted that it could not even begin to be *this* gift—the incarnate God. The gift could be *offered* (to Mary) but *not* given, and a gift offered is not yet a gift, just as 'a place at a university' only becomes a 'something' when this offer is taken up and exercised. And while a bicycle given might remain in a sense a gift if it lay around unused, one could only give 'cycling' if the gift was taken up. But 'use' is really intended by every giving of every gift. Hence reception and reciprocity is a condition of the gift as much as vice-versa. Marion sees that distance equals absolute exchange, yet still grasps this as a paradox of the absolutely unilateral gift. He does not allow that exchange equally *constitutes* distance and especially that the distance of Father from Son is a distance established in exchange, as much as an exchange established in distance. Of course, there is an absolute priority of the distance of the Trinity *from us* over our 'exchange' with the Trinity, yet we participate in the trinitarian exchange such that the divine gift only begins to be as gift to us at all (since in this case there is no neutral 'desert') *after* it has been received—which is to say returned with the return of gratitude and charitable giving-in-turn—by us.[45]

Marion therefore fails to see that reciprocity is as much a condition for the gift as gift is for reciprocity. In other words, for the giver *as well as* the recipient, a 'pre-given' (or given with, not by the gift) intersubjectivity has priority. Hence in qualification of Marion, my brief examination of the four theological *topoi* of Creation, Incarnation, Atonement and Trinity has suggested less an absolutization of the unilateral gift, than an absolutization of gift-exchange. This is essentially because the divine gift never, save in the impossible moment of contradiction instanced by sin, hovers in a desert such as might separate two uncertainly friendly tribes, waiting to be picked up or not. If it did, then it would indeed reside in a space 'outside' Being, and indifferent to it. Marion posits such an 'otherwise' in the interests of the logic of Creation over-against the metaphysics of Being. However, the considerations just enunicated in favour of *agape* as heightened 'gift-exchange', rather than as heightened 'pure gift', are absolutely of one piece with a refusal of theology as an extra-ontological discourse. For the divine gift which hovers indifferently before human response, is indistinguishable from a gift given in a merely *ontic* context between two creatures who are external to each other. However much Marion may wager on an 'extra-ontological' instance (that cannot be mere potential, unity, etc.), the only ways he finds to speak of the 'distance' which this supposedly opens up always reduce to cases of mere *ontic* difference, rather than ontological difference, which is not a difference 'between things'. His valid conclusions in this respect against Levinas in his early work[46] seem to redound against himself: every vaunted discovery of a difference in excess of the ontological difference turns out to be a mere ontic difference after all, still obscuring the ontological difference from view. Hence an absolutization of gift 'without being' reduces to an absolutization of empty subjectivity, whose apparent *kenosis* is almost indistinguishable from demonic self-enclosure. The gift without being is not a gift 'of' anything, and so is not a gift. Whereas a gift of something already presents a relationship, a certain measure, a certain order, albeit infinite. God gives his Spirit; this, says the New Testament, is *the* gift, yet it *is* the relationship between Father and Son in which the Father, in fully giving himself to the Son also fully consigns himself, as giver, to *this* infinite form, shape or image of his donation. As Marion himself would insist, if gift is not prior to, but coincident with relation, then the enterprise of a 'post-metaphysical' (non-ontological) discourse, is aborted, since while a gift may always be arriving, and yet not be, relations (as much as substances, which a theological ontology might want to dispense with, or downgrade) always *are*.

Marion's extra-ontological gift does not, therefore, I contend, capture the logic of Creation, which demands, indeed, *another* ontology, perhaps precisely an ontology of the gift, but all the same an ontology. However, to grasp exactly why Marion considers an exit from metaphysics to be theologically necessary, one has to understand something of his relationship to Heidegger. Such a grasp is important for my argument, because it provides

the key to showing that the extra-ontological gift, although in no simple sense 'incoherent', points necessarily in a nihilistic rather than a theological direction. In *L'Idole et la Distance*, Marion distanced himself from Levinas's *autrui* (for reasons just mentioned) and instead derived the thematic of 'gift' from the later works of Heidegger, especially the essay 'On Time and Being'. Somewhat implausibly (and he does not seem to have since repeated the claim) he construed Heidegger's *Ereignis* as establishing a genuine kenotic 'distance' between Being and beings which superseded Heidegger's earlier tendency to so 'fold' the two together that ontic presence was finally 'appropriated' through the ineffable temporal unfolding of Being itself.[47] Marion then suggested that the ontological difference was itself a kind of 'trace' of the distance between Father and Son and elaborated a somewhat 'scholastic' account of the giving of the first distance within the ever-yet-greater-distance of the second.[48] This, again, does not seem to have been reiterated, and Marion later correctly denounces Heidegger for consistently suppressing the ontic in the appropriating *Ereignis* of the ontological. His perception of an agonistic relation between ontic and ontological levels in Heidegger is profound and accurate, just as his desire to put the ontic 'back into play' is supremely ethical. My doubt concerns merely the need to step outside the ontological in order to do this, or in other words whether the ontological/ontic relation must *necessarily* be construed agonistically.

Despite this later modification of his position in *L'Idole et la Distance*, a strikingly singular relationship to Heidegger, first articulated in this work, has nonetheless persisted. It is singular because it has two inter-linked, yet very nearly opposed aspects. In the first place, Marion accepts that Heidegger has completed ontology, while infringing and surpassing it. The key to this completion is a rendering of the ontological difference in terms of the *aporias* of time, such that the ontic (particular beings with definable 'essences', to speak in a Thomist register) is identified with 'ordinary time', or the necessary illusion of a succession of isolated 'nows', while the ontological is identified with always 'passing' ecstatic temporality, wherein the present dissolves into the trace of the past and the projection of the future. *Thereby*, the Being of the being (its actuality, and not mere possibility) which Heidegger describes as 'presence' as opposed to 'the present' is entirely 'given' from the movement of time.[49] If Being exhaustively belongs with temporality, then, inevitably, talk of a transcendent God can only be talk of the extra-ontological.[50] Even if one asserts, as indeed Marion allows, that God also is 'to be', that he gives Being out of his plenitude of infinite *esse*,[51] it is nonetheless true that the only 'reason' for invoking God at all in this perspective derives from the experience of receiving Being as a gift from a divine source that is more fundamentally 'without Being'.

The question to be posed here is, what *authorises* the reading of ontological difference in terms of the play of the *aporias* of time? While, certainly, it is temporal movement that constantly delivers to beings (or essences) their

ever-renewed participation in Being by which alone they subsist, since they have no reason 'to be' in themselves, this does not *necessarily* require that we identify the participatory mode of ingress of Being (time) with Being as such. An Augustinian resolution of the *aporia*, whereby what arrives through time arrives from the plenitude of eternity, allowing us to interpret the 'double nullity' of time—whereby the 'present' dissolves into past and future, and yet the flow of past to future can only be apprehended as an apparent linear sequence of present moments—as evidence of the essential nullity of the created order in itself, remains possible. It is notable here that Heidegger provides what is almost certainly an immanentist parody of the Augustinian account of the participation of temporal relationality in the relations of the Trinity: 'Approaching, being not yet present, at the same time gives and brings about what is no longer present, the past, and conversely what has been offers future to itself. The reciprocal relation of both at the same time gives and brings about the present'.[52] However, where Augustine saw the past (memory) and the present (understanding) as engaged in a reciprocal gift and return (since the trace of the past is not passively recorded, but only registered at all when brought into relation with present understanding) and then both as giving the future (will) which equally gives rise to past and present, Heidegger sees the *primary* exchange (that is the exchange which for Augustine images that of God the Father with the Son) as of past with future, the present being the gift of both from their giving to each other; just as, in the Trinity, for Augustine, the Holy Spirit is the gift of the relation of Father to Son. However, for Heidegger the 'present' does not itself give but can only be 'expropriated', cancelled, by the mutual interplay of past and future. Their bizarre *gift exchange*, of nothing with nothing (another way of expressing Derrida's unilateral passage *from* nothing to nothing) ensures that the present (the ontic) is held within an immanentist circle, and destroyed, sacrificed, in this pagan sacral space. Hence Heidegger is driven to speak of time-space, for without transcendence time *must* be spatialized, in order to be rendered self-sufficient and enclosed within its own empty gift-exchange. By contrast, Augustine's account of the reciprocal relations of time, according to which the second moment is the *present* (understanding), and past/present, not past/future mimic the Father/Son relation, permits to the present 'now' its own spontaneity and equal primacy within 'true' time which allows ingress to the ontological. And whereas, for Heidegger, the third moment is the present, whose giving makes a mere circular return to past and future, for Augustine the third moment is the future, which only gives from itself, both past and present, without expropriating the latter, because it draws upon the infinite plenitude of Being which is God.

For this Augustinian view, both sides of the temporal *aporia*—time as 'now' and time as 'passage'—remain ontic, though certainly the latter is the means of ingress for the ontological, and one can add to a Thomist perspective that the temporal *aporia* is the site for 'the real distinction' between essence

and existence in creatures (beneath the angelic level). However such real distinction does not amount (and did not amount for Aquinas) to a full explication of the ontological difference, as it did, effectively, for Heidegger (who attributed his *own* error at this point falsely to Aquinas), since he located it strictly within the immanence of temporal reality. Such a location can surely be nothing other than an act of ungrounded judgment (or of 'faith'), yet Heidegger treats it as the result of a kind of extreme apprehension, albeit at the very limits of the possibility of apprehension. As Marion himself has recently stressed, Heidegger remained to the end a phenomenologist, such that in speaking about the temporality of Being, he considered that he was speaking about reality when 'reduced' to its fundamental 'givenness' as a *phenomenon* for raw intuition, the primary passivity of *Dasein*.[53] For all that Being remains, for Heidegger, by definition outside our conceptual grasp (which grasps only the ontic), it yet discloses itself to us precisely *as that* which is disclosed in self-concealing, as that which has no preferred content and so as the univocal 'presence' or 'passage' of time which is exhausted by the happenings in time which it nonetheless ceaselessly suspends.

Therefore, Heidegger never sufficiently questions the correspondence between Being and knowledge, or the idea that 'vision' is our primary mode of access to what is. This appears all the stranger, as such a questioning is precisely the basis for his unmasking of philosophic, 'theoretical' reason as secretly technological reason, since the beings definable by sight are beings definable by their manipulability. Yet while, for Heidegger, Being does not arrive at intellectual sight in this ontic manner, nonetheless it arrives at sight by overwhelming it and then is defined (by sight) *as* that which overwhelms, since it is never present to itself and never really 'there'. Being dissolves into nothingness for Heidegger, but this thesis derives *precisely* from a contrived Cartesian correlation of Being with knowledge. Two things in particular are here not sufficiently attended to. First of all, the 'act' character of Being is fully apprehended only 'internally', by an existent thing and not according to external sight. When Being is construed as act or *energeia* (for all that Heidegger seeks to confine this notion to 'metaphysics') it becomes clearer that it cannot in any fashion be presented to our intuition, and therefore that 'ontological difference' remains for the understanding the site of a problem. The only clues to its resolution reside in our 'internal', limited experience of what it is to be actual, to receive, *not* over against us, but *as* our own ever-greater actuality. Since the Whole does not appear, we can only 'conjecture' (to use Nicholas of Cusa's term) concerning it, and conjecture only on the basis of all our microcosmic selves, which means, at the same time, to conjecture concerning our own nature as participants in Being. That is to say, we cannot escape *judging*, and if we take our judgments to be, themselves, gifts or graces (*charismata*), then we do not see this donation, but rather feel it, *take it to be such.*

This points up the second thing not fully considered by Heidegger: since Being as 'act' can only be fully known 'internally', its plenitude may be less accessible to intellectual 'sight' than to subjective desire. Only a certain stance, a certain judgement, a certain 'taking as', a certain *attitude*, may receive Being correctly in its alterity. Such a position concerning the primacy of *eros* was, of course, already elaborated by Plato, and further developed by the Cappadocians and Augustine. But does it not *deconstruct* the entire post-Heideggerean opposition between the metaphysical and the post-metaphysical, whether or not this site is appropriated for theology? For love (or the singular, the event or excess for more secular variants) only *exceeds* the ontological, if Being has already been strictly correlated with knowledge—a shift perhaps begun with Aristotle, but only 'completed' by Descartes. Marion maintains precisely the latter genealogy and yet does not, as he claims, truly demonstrate that *every* metaphysics inverts in order to complete itself into epistemology.[54] (And remains necessarily, and undecidably *both* epistemology and ontology.) A metaphysics of *eros* surely does not. And such a metaphysics cannot readily be set over against the discourse of faith based on pure reception of a 'revelation', since the Bible makes abundantly clear that revelation arrives at (although it also provides) the inspired person, the correctly attuned person, the one who judges and desires aright. Paradoxically, a discourse of revelation divorced from such a metaphysics will be forced to mimic the intellectualism of onto-theological philosophy: what arrives will be brute knowledge, knowledge for our pure reception. Even though we cannot contain this knowledge (like the Cartesian infinite), its primary mark is still a sublime overwhelmingness and for *this* reason primarily, it is claimed by Marion as 'gift' not possibly derivable from our finitude. But why should we take such a gift to be the personal gift of love? For that to follow, the sublime gift would have to show itself also as beautiful, as supremely desirable, and therefore would be revealed via our already wakened judgement and desire (which, of course, could always judge and desire otherwise, perversely). Hence a stress on 'pure' revelation, pure passivity in the face of the gift reduces, like the construal of God as iconic distance, to a merely *ontic* objectivity after all, just as this same 'neo-orthodoxy' self-dissolves into a 'liberal' foundationalism of religious experience. In seeking to exceed the ontological difference, a vauntedly non-metaphysical theology always collapses back into the *worst* metaphysics, that is to say an onto-theological construal of God and Revelation as 'objects' and 'individual' things, which we first 'experience' in an immediate fashion.

It can therefore be argued that Marion's account of 'gift' remains, after all, bound within a Cartesian priority of the 'given', in the sense of that which is spatially and measurably over-against us. Whereas Hans Urs von Balthasar, for all his suspicion of 'titanism', was supremely careful to insist on the mediatory role of human created spontaneity, active intelligence and creative expression in the reception of divine glory, Marion insists on a

phenomenological passivity, which far from humbling our modernity, only repeats its essence.[55] For if, as Heidegger saw, technology realises the *theoretic* project, then its aim is not to protect the unknown surplus of creative originality (which always acts 'in the middle voice', receiving what it invents as inspiration)[56] but on the contrary to reduce our subjective contribution to a simple *a priori* method (which *persists* in the phenomenological 'anti-methodological' injunction to receive everything 'as it is', referring to nothing prior as cause or foundation—a method which yields nothing but a *sequence* of discrete foundations). Concomitantly it reduces reality to a fully 'given' plane, so that every significant 'new' thing will be pre-definable merely as a new set of 'combinations'. Cartesian *mathesis* already projected capitalist spatialization and the end of history, thereby ruling out the need to discover truth via the oral 'exchange' of dialogue, which will not allow truth to be purged of narrative time and subjective inventiveness. Likewise it ruled out an exchange of gifts dependent upon temporal delay conjoined with non-identical repetition. Within the space of the impersonal, scientific, technocratic 'given', no *gifts* are or can be given.[57] However, the consolation for this managerialist, constructualist domination, the vauntedly 'free', unilateral gift, remains also trapped within the same space. What remains for the free giver to give save the given, which we already know, so that it can never surprise or please, unless it be his own mere freedom before which we are supposed to exhibit pious amazement? And does not Marion's God offer us this modern gift of absolutized free subjectivity, whose glory resides in its formal distance, leaving no intrinsic mark within 'given' things to qualify their extended vanity?

If, in the first place, Marion accepts Heidegger's completion of ontology, and therefore, in order to speak theologically is compelled to *exceed* ontological discourse, he also, in the second place, derives the very space of this exceeding *from* Heidegger's ontology itself. This space has already been detailed in my account of Derrida: Heidegger's ontology is itself internally exceeded by gift, since time and Being outside the mode of presence are, in Heidegger's terms, *no longer* Being. They turn into that which 'gives' Being, although this 'that' is really identical with 'nothing'. Marion then converts the donating *nihil* into a phenomenologically apprehended 'call' from a gift now standing at a *distance* from Being, with which it is no longer 'enfolded'.[58] In a second move, which appeals to revelation, he 'identifies' the call as divine love, and ontological emergence *ex nihilio* as creation *ex nihilio*. But surely this raises the suspicion that the space of the gift, *as* an extra-ontological space, is only required within the logic of a strictly immanentist construal of the ontological difference, which as I have argued, expresses a philosophical option, not the termination of philosophy. An unattainable 'beyond being' is demanded by an atheism which tries to think onto-emergence out of nothing, not by the revealed word of the Bible.

This suspicion, nevertheless, is relatively trivial. What is of much more moment is that the nihilistic account of the unilateral gift, as professed by

Derrida, thinks through its unilateral character in the only possibly consistent fashion, as compared with Marion's theological variant. An absolutely pure giving, outside all motivations of self-pleasing, all return of self to self, and all expectation of any sort of return from the other, is more radically and coherently conceived in terms of an impersonal *nihil*. And any experience of self, even as willing, would seem to violate the purity of such imperatives. To put this the other way round, one might say that the need to attribute 'personality' to Marion's God remains obscure. This is so despite Marion's systematic substitution of divine gift for divine causality. Such a move is correct in so far as God does not stand at the end of a chain of causes but indeed gives to be, since he himself *is* this effect and activity, although creation can only share in it in part.[59] However, to speak of a God who is because he loves, but does not have to be, rather than of God who loves as he is 'to be' according to an absolute, self-grounded necessity, is to invoke a free giving of himself in God that is curiously *akin* to Descartes' *causa sui*, according to which God is 'cause of himself' rather than a simple 'first cause', or absolute ground of all causality. This formulation, which presupposes Cajetan's and Suarez's slide into thinking of God under the category of 'individual unity',[60] and suggests that the first cause is univocally akin to finite cause and so must 'act on' something (if only itself), is regarded by Marion as the very consummation of onto-theology.[61] Yet quite clearly, it results from a suppression of the idea of God as *esse*, as supremely the source and ground of all beings rather than their final principle of causal explanation.[62] If God is gift, or *bonum*, somehow 'before' he is 'to be', then this risks repeating the same suppression and once against essentializing and objectifying him.

For Marion, Aquinas's substitution of *esse* for *bonum* as the 'first' name of God, derives wholly from the latter's contention that Being is the 'first' object of intellection, assumed by all other acts of cognition, thereby idolising God as akin to an object of knowledge. Yet this is to press Aquinas's understanding both of knowledge and of being too much into a Cartesian mode; for Aquinas, no act of understanding is unaccompanied by the will to the good, together with the judgement of beauty which tends to fuse the two, and 'Being' is the first name of God *because* it is the site of the transcendental coincidence of truth, beauty and goodness, *including* the self-diffusing character of the latter.[63] To assert this primacy, in contrast to Dionysius, is finally to disperse the Neoplatonic suspicion that actuality, in its rich plenitude of diversity and always defined limited character, is necessarily *adverse* to perfected good or absolute unity which is both infinite and absolutely one in being non-ontic, not this nor that.[64] From Porphyry through Victorinus, Augustine and Dionysius himself, to Aquinas, it is grasped that Being, also, need not be ontic. Hence one may conclude that a primacy in God of gift over Being risks *either* a reduction of God to ontic cause and individual subjective unity, or *else*, if its non-ontic status is preserved, assimilation to the

impersonal Neoplatonic One, which, as Rainer Schürmann has recently argued, seems better preserved in its purity when reduced to the status of a Heideggerean 'nothing', that delivers temporal presence.[65]

The above discussion of Marion's theology and philosophy leads me to suggest that a gift constituted by 'distance' *alone* is not a gift which, according to Derrida's correctly sceptical logic of the unilateral gift, could be given, since it remains itself unilateral. To the contrary, a divine gift that can be given must still exemplify, albeit at the extreme, the logic of gift-exchange which depends not only on *distance*, which locates the gift in the giver, but also on *exchange* which commits the very being of the giver to the gift and the expected return of the gift in reciprocal relation, and this in turn upon *delay* and *non-identical repetition* which alone distinguish the gift, within a kind of contract, from contract. I have already tried to suggest how the categories of 'suitability' of the gift and 'self-expression in generosity' permit one to regard both delay and non-identical repetition (contra Bourdieu and Derrida) as not reducible to disguised manipulations of contract.

3. *Agape and Gift-Exchange/Theology and Ontology*

It must, however, now be insisted, as a crucial aspect of my argument for *agape* as the consummation of gift-exchange, that these categories are by no means perfectly or consistently exemplified in 'local' gift-economy societies which, from a Christian viewpoint, should be regarded as possessing a merely 'advent' character. One may note, crucially, that in such societies the scope for creativity was relatively limited. While it may be true to say that they 'aim' for exchange, for an ever renewed circularity like the *Kula* which rings Melanesia in a perpetual dance of ornaments, signs and tales of past circulations,[66] it is clear that they equally aim to ensure the reproduction of the circle in as self-identical a form as possible.[67] Variations in the content of a gift are often restricted to quantitative difference or else alternations in the species of a gift within a certain *genus*, the number and types of *species* being rigidly pre-defined.[68] Moreover, these somewhat varying gifts were always themselves inscribed with the same unvarying *marks*, the stamps of identity and eternal belonging. Such marks ensured that gifts *already* fractured the oral economy of non-identical repetition from which they nonetheless arose. For just as every gift-exchange marked an intrusion into the seamless fixity of status, so that the more exchange took place with *strangers* the more a 'modern', 'liberal' contract was always already present,[69] so, also, gifts were already 'written' as well as spoken. Prior to the contract accompanying a transaction, the things contracted themselves recorded the transaction and, indeed, that was almost the whole point of exchange, which aimed to establish solidarity. Such hieroglyphic marks did not at all (à la Derrida) contrive to preserve an irreducible and mysterious 'absence' in human comprehension, but rather, through a first spatializing totalisation charted the absolute

bounds of a symbolic cosmos. The *only* absence they maintained was the recording of a never fully paid debt, since the tribal ancestors or gods always demand more and more return for their absolute gift of life, and more and more *exactitude* in the circular repetition of symbolic identity.[70] Since the human creditor can only have achieved his status by *initially* becoming indebted and subordinate, that is to say by receiving a gift in order to acquire wealth, (unless he acquires this through *production* and not exchange) the more *ideal* creditor is the god/ancestor with unlimited access to productive abundance who was never first in debt. Hence the primacy of human debt, intrinsic to the gift economy, is only fully established by way of the always inherited debt to the ancestors.[71] We have forgotten (perhaps to our peril) how primary a task such repayment of debt or the sheer reproduction of cultural norms can seem for most societies, and recent research on gift-exchange has tended to stress the crucial significance of the inclusion of sacrifice to gods/ancestors within the exchanging cycle. And the return which the ancestors demand is intended preservation of their memory: identical repetition in a concrete rather than abstract mode (the latter being more characteristic of modernity).

Hence in local societies, creativity in gift-giving, and (I am arguing) gift *as such*, has a somewhat restricted place. By exactly the same token, spontaneous generosity is subordinate to the priority of debt, or the duty always to return things to their 'proper' places, and maintain the *same* things in circulation. The inherent violence of such a system reveals itself in the painful inscribing of the markings of tribal identity upon human bodies, and the ungovernable war between one symbolic system and another.[72] What matters in such societies is *not* the claim which the other makes upon us in his irreducible externality—such that whatever common space may circumscribe us both it is never closed or completed defined (so also open to the arrival of new 'others')—but rather the securely maintained *whole*, prevailing *either* at the level of the organic society, or at that of the single individuals, wearers of the mask of the tribe, and especially the representative chief or king. In local gift economies, contract characteristically *interrupts* status, but only to bring it as far as possible back within the scope of status, or the identically repeated. They fail to attain to a primacy of *serial relation* wherein the original and inevitable interruption of the same by the other need not be construed as an intrusion, but rather as that which alone *constitutes* the identity of the same, yet never in a foreclosed fashion. This would amount to a *real* priority of gift-exchange, or a necessary reception and outgoing on the part of the human subject.

Without a primary relationality, there can be no gift-exchange, and without the latter, no gift at all, as I have argued. But such primary relationality was already thought by the Hebrews. It is established in the notion of a covenant (*berith*) with God or other humans. This is particularly well attested by the story of Jacob's flight from Laban, the sinister totalizing patriarch who

seeks to 'contain' his brother and son-in-law by claiming absolute rights over all his relations and descendants. He is portrayed indeed as a 'big man' who uses gifts of women over two generations (Rebekah, Rachel and Leah) to establish thraldom and indebtedness rather than reciprocity. Jacob ends his flight by setting up the pillar *Mizpah* between himself and Laban, which secures and allows the exteriority and legitimate absence of Jacob and Laban to each other, while simultaneously determining this interval as that of the 'Lord's Watch' which secures Laban's *just* interest in his daughters, although permitting them their new belonging with Jacob (Genesis 31).

This same 'interval' was sometimes marked by the shedding of blood. Blood-covenant, as Georges Davy noted, belongs in the same category as gift, since it is a pre-graphic form of contract, often involves the marking of bodies (as in Hebrew circumcision) and achieves a certain negotiation with the other, in this case by the artificial convention of a unity of blood lineage.[73] Whereas, with a gift, the circulation of 'one' thing establishes a single space, with blood-covenant the 'cutting' of the thing establishes respective shares. But the same effect of bonding is thereby achieved, and, in the book of Samuel, Jethro's ancient gift of his daughter to Moses is considered to have established a blood-bond with his tribe, the Midianites (Kenites) (Sam. 15:6; Judg. 1:16). However, blood covenant can concern, as in this example, exchange not just within the tribe, but also with the alien. It contrives a way to *preserve* a familial logic at the point where, otherwise, one would surrender to the formalism of contract. And through their construing of their relation of God in terms of the legal fiction of blood, the Hebrews did not enter upon the path of hypostasized contract with a power possessing absolute rights, but rather made primary a *relation* with the other who stands outside the familial whole (thus God is *no longer* first and foremost an ancestor, or the ultimate progenitor) and *yet* is accorded a familial regard.[74] Since God is not the ancestor who demands yet again the same, but the 'living' God who makes ever-new demands (as he gives ever-new gifts), it follows that every human covenanted partner is also treated as one who needs, in himself, specific *sorts* of gift. No longer is the content of a gift a matter of preserving the same inscriptions, but rather of sending a message *appropriate* to the particular recipient. Although *berith* carries gift-norms over into the realm of exchange with the alien, its relatively contractual character ensures that questions of *justice*, which is to say of appropriateness, intrude more into the sphere of gift. But since, as I have argued, gifts only remain gifts *if* they are appropriate in their content, and not just according to the formalities of the conditions of giving, justice does not contaminate gift but ensures it, as it ensures, also, *agape*. Thus blood-covenant with the other was made into the paradoxical mark of Jewish *inherited descent* itself; to a greater degree than with 'local' societies, the initiating sign of one's sacrificial renouncing of 'one's own' women (mothers and sisters) for possible union with alien women became the *key* sign, and moreover a hidden one, of one's

inherited 'interior' identity (without the imposition on the body of any other *positive* mark which be the arbitrary stamp of 'this' tribe). Thereby identity was fractured, and to be Jewish was to be rendered 'open' to the other, unshielded by any barrier from the imperative to unite and bear fruit.[75] This situation is revealed by Jacob's willingness to enter into marital and religious covenant with the Hivites, rather than take revenge upon them for the rape of his daughter Dinah (the course his sons treacherously follow) if only they will agree to be circumscised (Genesis 34).

It is in the light of the specificity of *berith* that one can interpret the early presence of both alphabetic writing and money within Hebrew society (arguably both derive from Semitic sources). One *cannot* construe these things as aspects of an inevitable evolution towards the self-interested making of contracts and the priority of the 'self-present' subject. In the case of alphabetic writing, hieroglyphic tyranny is interrupted, and oral memory actually *assisted* by the recording of different variants. Once the oral *vater* not only speaks the same again, differently, yet also cannot, in the face of the record, pass off his new version as now the canonical one (so actually *surrendering* to hieroglyphic graphism), he must see all the versions, including his own, as provisional, and as 'prophetically' awaiting a final apocalyptic fulfilling of what they announce. The *accompaniment* of law by prophecy in Israel (and not in antithesis to it) prevented any Babylonian graphic centrism of the spatial empire.[76]

Use of *money* exhibited a similar preventive economy. Just as alphabetic writing suspended hieroglyphic presence, so, also, the quantitative equivalence of things in terms of money checked the egotistic, accumulative opportunities afforded by gift economy, in so far as its non-determination of exactly what is due and when, permitted certain individuals perpetually to gamble upon the stakes of reputation. More exact definition of debts, interests and periods of grace allowed a regular justice to govern typical cases, in place of an incipient agonism, although, naturally, such justice requires to be supplemented by equity. At the same time, just as alphabetic writing assisted oral prophecy (and covenant bound the Other within familial relation) so, also, money reinforced the gift by ensuring that *even* the incipiently contractual relation with the Other was bound back within the logic of the gift. This was possible because all monetary loans and taxes were mediated through the Temple, the Site of sacral exchange with God, and money in Ancient Israel (according to the witness of the *Mishnah*, which there is little reason to doubt at this point) retained a relatively non-alienable, personalized character: one's debt remained one's own, and could not be discharged by another on the payment of an arbitrary interest. The key event which rendered the Jews incipient capitalists was the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.: from then on, money started to assume a more abstract and alienable form.[77] Prior to this, it is arguable, non-alienated money assisted the covenanted securing of contract as gift which nonetheless modified gift-as-reproduction-of-the-whole

in the direction of giving *what is due* to the other. Hence tithing, a monetary gift to the Temple, was the *model* for other transactions. And the commuting of Temple offerings into equivalent gifts to the poor ('almsgiving') which extended greatly during the intertestamental period, and forms a vital part of Jesus's mission and later apostolic practice (Luke 10: 7, 35), shows how a unique monotheistic economy of sacred offering had a specific practical effect.[78]

For the Old Testament, God was not regarded as *in need* of human sustaining, nor were his favours truly to be bought. Jewish sacrifice already edged closer to the performance of an absolute duty of sheer gratitude, just as the Levitical emphasis on offering the *entirety* of an animal in frequent holocausts combined with equitable portionings of sacrificial meat in the case of the 'peace offering' to all participants, or to a strictly *representative* priesthood in the case of the 'sin offering', implies equal purification of all members of this society in their offering to God (and even of all peoples, universally) rather than literal 'sustaining' of a hierarchy and division of the relatively pure and impure, insider and outsider, as in most other cultures.[79] Here gift appears to veer in a 'unilateral' direction, but the point is rather that the repetition of gift (by which alone gift can 'be') is prised away from any *specific* expectation or duty of return, but related instead to a heightened and infinite expectation of variegated return in acts of mercy which alone complete and legitimate a *universal* sacrificial offering. As there is no limit to God's goodness and mercy, so also there is no limit to the joyful return made of Israel herself to God which is focussed in the persons of the priesthood. The same logic is then transferred to almsgiving. As God gives to us, who are infinitely needful, so we should give to the needful, without stint or 'counting of the cost'. Only gratitude and 'good use' are expected in return. This practical diverting of a Temple surplus may be seen as inhibiting another possible diversion of such surplus (which as gift to God or gods *cannot* in the ordinary sense be returned) into accumulated *capital*. As C.A. Gregory has shown, one can give examples of such a 'religious' route to primary accumulation.[80]

Related also to this new Hebrew concern for the specific needs of the individual ('justice') was a greater willingness to interrupt and restart the gift-cycle through sheer forgiveness, the treating 'as if' a return had been made, which is to say the cancellation of debts, that involved a concrete restoration to social functioning. Thus there was to be enacted *more frequently* than the Jubilee rule regarding reversion of property (Levit. 25:10)—which is firmly inscribed within a gift-exchange logic of non-alienability (and could, of course, perpetuate inherited inequalities)—the seven-year rule regarding cancellation of 'debts' (Deut. 15:1–2) including all forms of outstanding anomaly. Within Israel, according to Deuteronomy, there is to be no debt, only perpetual cancellation of debt (Deut. 15:1–6). But Israel in relation to *other peoples* is to be a nation of creditors. What later marks the 'New Testament' *as such* is that now there is *no longer* any outside of Israel.

The New Testament frequently suggests that unstinting generosity and the cancellation of debts cease to be intermittent, or directed merely to the needy and defaulters, but become the *habitual norm* of a new form of community practice (Romans 12). Without abrogating the law, which comprises, inseparably, both contract and writing, the gospel nonetheless insists that it exists only to point up or enable a more radical *gift-giving* and *orality* (the spirit, not the letter) which is the real energy of Being deriving from divine Creation, and in no way *presupposes* sin and the need to contain it: as, for example, measures of 'justice' are often insurances against the *lack* of gratitude in particular individuals. Such 'welfare', the New Testament suggests, is only provisional, and 'salvation' still requires a genuine community of infinitised gift-exchange, including reciprocal for-giving. In his *Epistle to the Romans*, St. Paul speaks of our being freed from any specific debt, even the debts due under the law (Romans 7: 6, 8, 12) since they were still *negatively* defined as something 'extra' and burdensome, yet speaks *also* of love as a new debt, not simply a unilateral spontaneity. But to 'owe no man anything save love' (13:8) means that the infinite debt is now a light burden and easy yoke, even where it involves repentance, since *all* that is due is our own outgoing within which alone we are. Beyond the law, Paul appeals indeed to love, but he thinks of this in terms of an at once older and more extended blood-covenant than the Jewish one. *All* descend in one blood-family from Adam, and therefore all inherit sin, the failure to receive and give connections, which causes death, and so cannot be self-corrected by a life no longer living. Many, more than the Jews, descend from Abraham (9: 11–16) who received again and so inaugurated a secret tradition of faith which the Jews now receive *back* from the Greeks and barbarians who by faith have imbided God's gift of his very self in Christ (9: 8, 14; 11:11–12). To discharge in part this debt of love to the gentiles (1:4), Paul writes to Rome in lieu of the *gift* (*charisma*) he would like to offer in person, with a message (1:11) concerning the need to *continue to listen*, to receive the other—which pure orality, pure gift, is the gospel of Christ itself (10:17). But the Romans, in turn, are exhorted to acknowledge the gift of the announcement of God which they owe to the Jews and their law, not only by words but also by material almsgiving to the poor in Jerusalem (15:16, 26–27). This reverse reception by the primary givers will pre-figure the apocalypse, the time when, once the Greeks and barbarians have been grafted into the Jewish line, through a now botanical and *unbloody* covenant (remembered not through pain but through the resultant cultivated, garden-enclosed and no longer wild, flourishing) the Jews will, in turn, fully acknowledge and receive back their very own lineage (11:12), *Agape* is accomplished as an infinite exchange between peoples, and as the full realization of the covenanted fiction of 'one blood'.

Paul's presentation of *agape* as intra-ecclesial exchange should be taken in conjunction with the earlier considerations I raised concerning the Marian

fiat. Even in its *origin*, the Church begins as an exchange and not as a simple reception of a unilateral gift. For the birth of Christ from his bride (Mary-*ecclesia*) is, although not itself the perfect gift which is Christ alone (but as such his reciprocal interplay with Father and Spirit), nonetheless a necessary condition for the giving of this gift to us. An aspect of Christ's *kenosis* is his entering into irreducible dependence and sociality, yet by virtue of his trinitarian existence there is no shedding of his aseity involved here. His birth from Jewish lineage and memory participates in his eternal derivation from the Father, as his giving of the Church from his side, and his always *himself* arriving only in and through this giving, participates in the eternal procession of the Spirit. Hence to receive God's *agape* means, not just to stand in the Christic position vis-a-vis the Father or receive Christ in the 'sublime' form of his ascended absence (these are Marion's emphases) but also to receive Christ in the specific form his narrative imaging of the Father takes, and to receive at the same time his always-already-present interplay with his Bride, the Church. One receives gift *as* the gift of an always preceding gift-exchange. Only such a perspective makes sense of why *agape* arrives as an interpersonal event and *not* simply as a new command, 'Thou shalt love ...'. We are instead given the *possibility* to love because we are given the true shape of love in the form of a love that is always already repeated, in a double sense—both within the series of Christ's continuous and coherent actions, and in the series of exchanges between him and his followers. To be a Christian is *not*, as piety supposes, spontaneously and freely to love, of one's own originality and without necessarily seeking any communion. On the contrary, it is to *repeat differently*, in order to repeat, *exactly*, the content of Christ's life, and to wait, by a necessary *delay*, the answering repetition of the other that will fold temporal linearity back into the eternal circle of the triune life.

I would suggest, therefore, that only the new covenant fully sustains a prophetic delay and non-identical repetition of the gift sufficient to characterise it *as* gift. What 'local' societies by contrast give is an implicit promise of this true gift. But it *is* gift-exchange which gives this promise, and the fulfilment of the promise does exchange gifts. Just as, I wish to re-affirm presently, Greek metaphysics pre-announces theology, and theology remains, in one aspect, a reconfiguration of the metaphysical.

To mediate this analogy, one should first note that just as Davy, Mauss and their successors did not do justice to the specificity of Israel with regard to gift and covenant (ignoring most of the features I have just outlined) so, also, they did not do full justice to the specificity of Greece and Rome. They wrote in terms of a gradual and inevitable transition from the honorific usuriousness of gift and orality to the monetary usuriousness of capitalism and writing. It has just been shown how, in the case of Israel, money and written contract did not of necessity herald this modern dawn, and the same thing must be said, for example, of Aristotle's *Politics* as one manifestation of

the Greek spirit. This work fully presupposes that written, contractual law is in place and, indeed, gift culture had been reduced to such a degree (despite 'the magnanimous man')[81] that Aristotle fantasises a pre-history of barter. Yet despite these epochal shifts, the *Politics* is explicitly opposed to money-making for its own sake. It is not that Aristotle opposes incipient monetary usuriousness in the name of gift-exchange (for its primacy has been forgotten) but instead in terms of a *different* potentiality of writing, namely that which underwrites a distributive justice. Derrida suggests that Aristotle imagined an economy of pure household management without market exchange,[82] but it is not exchange *per se* which he opposed; rather, it is exchange for the Midas-gain of money.[83] By this reading, Derrida evades the Artistotelian possibility of exchange that is not usurious, an exchange that occurs within a sphere of specifically political being, comprehended by justice and judgment. This evasion is all of one piece with the still Heideggerean assumption that Being as such correlates strictly with visual knowledge, since Derrida assumes that exchange places the recipient within the totalising grasp of the donating ego who receives back from this Other (negation of the negation) only the gain of an increase of self-subsistence, whether in the form of material goods or spiritual self-regard. Just as Derrida does not consider that the (infinite, non-closed) sphere of Being might exhibit truth for judgement and desire rather than for unaccompanied vision, so also he does not consider that the circle of the *agora* within the wider circle of the *polis* (both evolved from a space marked out *by the circulation of gift*) might be a site for judgement, for appropriate partitioning, which can never be simply according to what *appears*, but requires mediation by the subjectivity of *phronesis*. A site *for* judgement, not a site *of* an always immanent contractual formalism.

Again, as in the case of Israel's law, the Greek move from gift to contract need not be regarded as a move away from generosity (and indeed the mere *seemingness* of their former generosity is legendary for us), but on the contrary as the result of a generous impulse to ensure that people are not left at the mercy of other's lack of generosity or desire to distort giving into control. A suspicion of archaic egoism *alongside* archaic organicism (the two being inseparable) is a recurring historical theme, and can perhaps be traced in the more valid aspects of humanist (and secondarily protestant) suspicion of mediaeval organised 'works'. The religious guilds operated a system of charity which at times threatened to lapse back into the ambiguity of archaic economy: ostensible assistance of others was often manipulated to secure the promotion of the guild itself.[84] Thus the puritans later substituted more regular, less 'festive' charitable institutions. The danger here was, of course, of rendering charity cold, cemented with justice yet alien to happiness and *eros*; equated too narrowly with 'welfare'. Instead of reforming the guilds, ensuring that they celebrated a calendar of non-identical repetition that did not degenerate into identical accumulation, festive charity (and thereby charity

as such) was abandoned. A new, fake, cold, accumulative charity helped both to constitute and compensate for a usurious, formally contractual political economy. Against this it should be proclaimed that, despite the continuous need, in certain times and places, for a regular, pre-scribed charity, this should only assist a more general practice which is oral, festive and non-usurious in either the antique or modern sense. Non-Identical Repetition. Perpetual Eucharist.

Perpetual eucharist: that is to say, a living through the offering (*through* the offering, through the *offering*) of the gift given to us of God himself in the flesh. Why should one identify the festival in this manner? Because the nihilistic denial of the possibility of the occurrence (in being) of non-identical repetition, is one and the same with the denial of the incarnate and resurrected God only manifest to us in the breaking of bread, always again. That is to say in gifts collected, offered by all, as all, to the all who is One, received back by all from the One, who are all thereby received into these same different gifts which are his Word. No indubitable logos—the *one* philosophy, the *one* true metaphysic, as Heidegger *et al.* are still secretly claiming—denies this possibility, but only one particular *logos*, one (post)modern philosophy which, for entirely arbitrary 'reasons', construes the given (every being offered to us) as the empty gift of nothing. This is according to the logic of a genuine but difficult and *mystical* atheism. In Derrida's variant, the difference of the gift cannot appear within the cosmos of being or the *agora* of exchange, since every appearance is inevitably recruited to the cause of measurable exchange of benefits which is the identical repetition of the same. Such difference, such giving, although it drives the circle of existence and exchange, 'is not' outside the circle. For no atheist or immanentist can believe in the reality of giving which is love, but only in its necessary phenomenality, always enslaved to something darkly other and impersonal. Without a faith in Charity, there is no longer hope. Yet faith remains possible, as *another* logos, another knowledge and desire, which we should not hesitate to describe as 'another philosophy' (another metaphysics, another ontology)[85] since the Church fathers themselves did not hesitate to do so and Platonic/Neoplatonic philosophy *already* pressed against any philosophical subordination of *mythos*, *cultus* and community.

Faith remains possible, but *not* because of the call of another voice besides, beyond or within being, for how could we speak of this save in merely ontic terms, and how, without *some* words, albeit inadequate, can we regard this non-ontological as thinkable or real in any sense whatsoever? No, faith remains possible, since one can read the givenness of being in another way, according to a different philosophy—as the trace of a real donation, demanding, not first knowledge as possession, nor yet the suspension which is *ennui* but rather wonder, desire, gratitude, banishment of *angst* and acceptance of continuous passage into death. For, according to the bleak meta-discipline of possible *logoi* (which *should* occupy the site now tenanted by 'post-philosophical'

discourses) it is possible that the ceaseless happening of the present despite its dying to live before itself, is a sign of the world's contradiction and (truly) its vanity, since it is nothing of itself, and ceaselessly arrives, by grace, from the plenitudinous, non-temporal source of being which is God. This possibility has primarily to be lived out as an existential stance, just as the *aporia* of time is not primarily an intellectual conundrum but a source of existential perplexity: should we live in recollection, expectation or for the moment? But all these possibilities turn out to be contradictory. Instead, only juridical surrender to the *nihil* or else joyful surrender of God remain as possible modes of life, which are at the same time 'ontological choices'.

The second possibility was brilliantly contended for by Hans Urs von Balthasar at the end of his *Herrlichkeit* volume on metaphysics.[86] He there argued that the double annihilation in time of Being in beings and beings in Being, as indicated by Heidegger, need not point to nihilism and so to a denial of the freedom and value of beings, but instead to an incomprehensible interplay between Being (which does not exist 'in itself') and beings (which *merely* exist, and might not be) which is founded in neither, and therefore indicates a 'givenness' of both from a source beyond time (since, I would add to Balthasar, this oscillation always traverses the temporal *aporia*). Balthasar's point is reinforced if one stresses that, in this theological context, the temporal *ens commune*, or non-subsistent being, ceases to be thought of as Being as such, but regresses to the site of *participation* in Being, for, as I argued against Heidegger, the 'passage' of time is as 'ontic' as the present 'now', although this passage is, indeed, the gate of access for the ontological. Only God, the giver, now 'identifies' for us Being-as-such. Considered as *esse ipsum*, subsistent being, he is an infinite *plenitude* of essential determination (the coincidence of *esse* with *essentia*) and *not* (as Balthasar rightly stresses) a mere negation of essence after the mode of *ens commune*. This determines the difference of God the giver from the given creation as the ontological difference, since this is a quandary which *may* be resolved in this fashion, not a univocal 'something' to be intuited. It is true to say with Balthasar, that God *gives* the difference of non-substantive *ens commune* from creaturely essences, yet *ens commune* in itself, as a merely *participatory* reality, does not entirely constitute one pole of the ontological difference, as Balthasar at times seems to imply (allowing too much to Heidegger's philosophical determination of the character of Being), by speaking of a difference of creator-giver from created gift 'beyond' the ontological difference.[87] His ambiguity here permits Marion to take the step which Balthasar rightly sees no need for—of posing an instance in God 'outside' *esse subsistens*.

Nevertheless, Balthasar is right to seek to accommodate a transcendality of gift which overlaps with the transcendality of being. This allows him, beyond Aquinas, to suggest a stronger link between the theological account of *esse* on the one hand, and trinitarian theology on the other. God is not so much the cancellation of the (one may add) temporal interplay between

Being and beings, as rather the absolute fulfilment of their interdependent relationality. Hereby God's *essential* Being, the *esse ipsum*, or the coincidence of Being with essence in God, is conceived as the full *giving* of Being as an infinitely determined essence, whereby, alone, there is 'to be'. It is not, however, as with Heidegger, that a Being that is also nothing 'is' itself in the necessary occlusion of presence, but rather that a plenitude of actuality 'is' in terms of its effecting and thereby determining 'itself' (which is equally 'another'). This notion of what is as what affects (what gives) or *can be* affected, is already described in terms of the category of *dunamis* in Plato's *Sophist* (247D) and was notably central in Gregory of Nyssa's development of a theological ontology and trinitarian theology: in Latin theology the theme persisted under the name *virtus*—an active potency of what is already fully actual in terms of complete ontological determination.[86] In God such potential is itself infinitely actualized, yet the category insists that an *infinite actus purus* (unlike that of Aristotle) is not a closure, or a circumscription—God does not limit even himself, any more than he causes, begins or ends himself.

The coincidence, in God, of Being and beings (or *esse* and *essentia*) as absolute relation of giver and given does not, therefore, at all approximate to a relation between unrealised potentiality and actuality. Whereas, for all their protests, the post-ontological models (in various guises) of Heidegger, Levinas and Marion inevitably do, and thereby remain *all the more firmly subordinate to ontology* in so far as they concern something on the way to Being, which is bound to be, if it is to be recognized. (The word 'bound' signalling *either* the impersonal determination of a *mathesis* or else the necessity of a merely ironic subject to decide for 'something'.) Paradoxically, where the *end* of giving is to be, even though it might not have been, and so is an absolutely free, univocal gift, then, indeed, a self-enclosed, unyielding and impersonal Being lies at the conclusion of the philosophical story. By contrast, where Being is already assumed, where Being is what there is to give, even though it is now, for a Christian ontology, seen to be only in this giving, then gift is 'further' to Being, and Being itself, as bound in the reciprocal relation of give-and-take, is for-giving, a giving that is in turn, in the Holy Spirit, the gift of relation. And if the created interplay between Being and beings, as Balthasar and Marion suggest, participates in the constitutive distance between Father and Son, then we, as creatures, only *are* as sharing in God's arrival, his for-giving, and perpetual eucharist. Only if this is the case, if first we really do receive, and receive through our participatory giving in turn, is it conceivable that there is a gift to us, or that we ourselves can give. This is the one given condition of the gift, that we love because God first loved us.

It being given that God is love.

NOTES

1 'Third sermon preached before King Edward the Sixth,' in Hugh Latimer, *Sermons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844).
2 See the OED entries under 'gift' and 'give'.
3 Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) pp. 5–6.
4 See OED entry under 'present'; Heidegger, On Time and Being, p. 10.
5 See Benjamin Constant 'The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns' in *Political Writings*, trans. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 308–329.
6 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (London: Collins, 1962) pp. 34–99.
7 The *National Trust* is a British charity which buys up and administers sites of natural beauty and historic importance in the public interest.
8 See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991) pp. 134–6.
9 This point was made to me by Nicholas Vincent, at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where I first delivered this paper.
10 This point was made by a Peterhouse undergraduate on the same occasion.
11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 1–30; *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 98–111.
12 See C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London/New York: Academic Press, 1982) p. 53, and Anthony Forge, 'Marriage and Exchange in the Sepik,' in Rodney Needham (ed.) *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (London: Tavistock, 1971) p. 137. Forge records the simultaneous exchange of identical decorated yams among the Sepik in the context of inter-clan exchange in a society governed by 'elders' rather than 'big men' and so possessing a less competitive character. However, these exchanges are of a ceremonial kind, whereas the more 'economic' exchanges sealing marriage display both delay and differentiation. And do not the decorations vary?
13 Georges Davy, *La Foi Jurée* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1922) pp. 371–74; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 48–54. It may be no accident that Roman law and custom contained both more traces of the gift than Greek law *and* more anticipations of modern contractual formalism.
14 See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* and *Outline of a Theory of Practice* pp. 71–83.
15 Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 5, 36, 72–3; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961) pp. 167ff.
16 Mauss, 22; Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities*, pp. 9, 53 and John Liep 'Ranked Exchange in Yela (Rossel Island),' in J.W. and E. Leach (eds), *The Kula* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) pp. 503–525. Gregory appears to stress only the self-interested aspect of 'giving back more' and to deny the social obligation to be ever-more-generous in big-man societies. But see Andrew Strathern, *The Rope of Moka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) for an account of a 'big man' urging the underlyings to give more at a gift-giving ceremony.
17 Gregory, pp. 22–71.
18 Gregory, p. 43: 'commodities are *alienable* objects transacted by aliens; gifts are *inalienable* objects transacted by non-aliens.' See also Mauss, p. 20; Annette B. Wiener, 'Inalienable Wealth', *American Ethnologist* (1985) pp. 210–224, and Signe Howell 'Of Persons and Things: Exchange and valuables among the Lio of Eastern Indonesia', *Man* 24/3 (Sept. 1989), pp. 419–39.
19 See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.
20 Mauss, pp. 23–24, 73. See also p. 59: Though a gift should be given and received, it is also 'dangerous', since it places the recipient under obligation—hence its simultaneously 'poisoned' character.
21 Mauss, p. 54: 'It was they [the Romans, Greeks and possibly "Semites of the North and West"] who after a veritable, great and admirable revolution, went beyond all the outmoded morality and this economy of the gift. It was too dependent on chance, was overresponsive

and too sumptuous, burdened with consideration for people, incompatible with the development of the market, commerce and production, and, all in all, at that time was anti-economic.' On page 46 Mauss refers to the gift economy as 'a long transitional phase' between total prestation and the commodity economy.

22 Mauss, pp. 65–83.

23 See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

24 See Annette B. Wiener, 'Reproduction: A Replacement for Reciprocity,' *American Ethnologist*. 7/1 (Feb. 1980), pp. 71–85.

25 For such a 'left-Maussian' critique of capitalism, see Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1992).

26 On the priority of debt and reproduction of identical markings, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* trans. Robert Hurley et al. (London: Athlone, 1983) pp. 185–93 and Annette B. Wiener 'Trobriand Kinship from another view,' *Man* 14, (1979) pp. 328–48.

27 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*.

28 Heidegger, *On Time and Being*: 'Being proves to be destiny's gift of presence, the gift granted by the giving of time' (p. 22); 'Time is not a thing, thus nothing which is, and yet it remains constant in its passing away without being something temporal like the beings in time (p. 3); 'As allowing-to-presence, it [Being] belongs to unconcealing; as the gift of unconcealing it is retained in the giving. Being is not. There is, It gives Being as the unconcealing; as the gift of unconcealing it is retained in the giving. Being is not' (p. 28); 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F. Krell. (London: Routledge, 1978): 'The nihilating in Being is the essence of what I call the nothing. Hence, because it thinks Being, thinking thinks the nothing' (p. 261). The antihumanist, supra-moral implications of this are spelt out in the next sentence: 'To healing Being first grants ascent into space: to raging its compulsion to malignancy'; *The Question of Being*, trans W. Kluback & J.T. Wilde (New York: Twayne, 1958), p. 99: 'The Question, "What is metaphysics?" only attempts the one thing: to induce the sciences to reflect that they necessarily, and for that reason always and everywhere encounter the complete other of Being, the nothingness belonging to Being.' And see, 'What is Metaphysics' in *Basic Writings*, pp. 93–110.

29 Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, p. 3 (see previous footnote). Derrida, *Given Time I*, p. 77: 'Not that it (the gift) is *opposed* to reason or to anything whatsoever—not at all ... but perhaps it passes by them so that something may come to pass, including something like reason, including everything'.

30 Derrida, *Given Time I*, p. 161. For Derrida the gift is *The Good*, yet is also 'capital', since it can only be *appropriated* by subjects as a fund to resource 'present' exchanges of commodities.

31 See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982).

32 Bataille, *Theory of Religion*.

33 For a parable of the need for *agape* to be self-expressive and creative, see Isak Dinesen, 'Babette's feast,' in *Anecdotes of Destiny* (London: Penguin, 1986) pp. 23–71.

34 Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et la Distance* (Paris: Grasset et Pasquelle, 1977) pp. 15–45, 102–7; *God Without Being*, pp. 1–48; *Prolégomènes à la Charité* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1986) pp. 147–181.

35 Gregory, p. 50: 'While it is conventional to interpret it [inalienability] in a literal sense at the level of pure theory, in practice this must be modified and interpreted in more of a metaphorical sense. Strictly speaking, like-for-like exchanges are impossible because, for example, a particular pig will be one day older tomorrow and hence a different pig. Thus 'likeness' is a social concept that varies from one gift economy to another.' And see Wiener, 'Inalienable Wealth'.

36 *God Without Being*, p. 34.

37 *God Without Being*, pp. 7–25.

38 *God Without Being*, p. 137: 'Venice becomes beautiful only because one loves there, and not the inverse, despite appearances; indeed Clichy, ever since Miller, certainly equals Venice; the beauty of the stones and of the sites still belongs to the domain of truth, hence of beingness—before love, it receives the dull blow of vanity, or escapes it only by the pure grace of association.' And see the whole of Chapter 4, pp. 108–139 and Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction et Donation* (Paris: P.U.F., 1989), pp. 260ff.

39 Whereas Marion's deployment of the prism analogy seems to approximate God too exactly to material light, see *L'Idole et la Distance*, p. 23: 'a multiplicity of colours decomposes, or

rather orchestrates that which a prism according to our capacity of sight ... the light which truly is not such, since it remained invisible at the very instance where it renders all things visible.' Marion's theology seems to leave little room for participation, for the eminent belonging of 'the colours', 'things visible' within God. In *God Without Being* Marion argues for 'indifference' by appealing to Paul's language of 'as if'—we should live, before 'the moment' (*kairos*) as if we had no wives, were not crying or rejoicing etc. (1 Cor 7:29–31). But surely this 'as if' is an acknowledgment of an always greater plenitude of *Being* in God and of God's capacity always to give again and give more. The 'as if' marks no suspension of Being, but rather the infinite sacrifice of faith which is justified in turn through faith in an immediate *return* of what is renounced. Marion perhaps needs to think Pascalian vanity in terms of Kierkegaardian sacrifice. Also notable here is his deliberate elevation of Pascalian *ennui* above Kierkegaardian *anxiety*. *Can* boredom always trump fear and is this a decidable question? To suggest, emphatically, that it can, implies a radical suspension of our *embodiment* that we could never be sure of sustaining. Also, *ennui* in face of the merely known can surely *not* cancel fear of an unknown before which we might not *even* be able to sustain such *ennui*, of some torment which might make us long to be bored. One is inclined to feel that anxiety is more ultimate after all ... And this conclusion *also* would tend to disallow the suspension of the ontological.

40 Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 47; 'God is not because he does not have to be, but loves.' That is to say, God is *because* he loves, which is *more* than to say, God is *as* loving. See also p. 105 and *'De la "Mort de Dieu" aux Noms Divins'. 'L'Itinéraire Théologique de la Métaphysique'* in D. Bourg et al, *L'Etre et Dieu* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986) pp. 103–130, esp. 125–6. One can agree with Marion that regarding the Creation there is a priority of love over being, since divine love persists despite the *nihil* and *death*, and thereby can create and resurrect. Yet surely this indifference is only possible because *in God* love absolutely 'is', possesses total ontological security. Otherwise, divine love is assimilated to an alternating and impersonal dialectic of life and death, with a concomitant *loss* of all transcendence, all 'distance'.

41 *God Without Being*, p. 104.

42 George Herbert, 'Gratefulnesse', in *George Herbert's Poems*, Introd. Arthur Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 126. Stephen Sykes drew my attention to this poem.

43 'Gratefulnesse', stanza 6.

44 Jean-Luc Marion, *'De la Mort de Dieu aux noms Divins'*, p. 125: 'to give itself, love does not require a being to receive it—the gift can accomplish itself even if no-one receives it perfectly (thus the prophets and Christ died while perfectly accomplishing the gift for which Christ sent them).' Just as love 'precedes' a sender of the gift, so it is 'indifferent' to the existence of a recipient. But is not 'distance' thereby depersonalized? And does not such a distance 'appropriate' its receiving pole, in almost the same fashion as Heidegger and Derrida's *es gibt*?

45 Marion consistently presents our distance from God in terms of our sharing in the distance of the Son from the Father. This is of course legitimate, but tends to suppress our distance from the Trinity as such, which implies not so much constitutive distance from the first giver, as rather constitutive distance from, *and* participation in, perfected reciprocity of give-and-take.

46 *L'Idole et la Distance*, pp. 264–9.

47 loc. cit.

48 *L'Idole et la Distance*, pp. 290 ff. See, by contrast, *God Without Being*, p. 104, where *Ereignis* is now seen to imply 'gift as appropriation, without any distance'. For Marion's later view, *phenomenology* itself uncovers 'a pure call' that is a reduction even of the pre-ontological/ontological *es gibt* to a pure pre-ontological which addresses a subject who is called—'interlocuted'—before he is, and therefore not 'folded back into' Being. *Revelation* then names the caller. See Jean-Luc Marion, *Réduction et Donation*, p. 305. One might ask here, first, is not the exact fit between a phenomenology of pre-ontological gift and a non-ontological theology of *agape all too* precise? And second, does an *agape* defined formally as pure reception of a will to love and as a pure will to love back (to the point where Marion is prepared to speak of 'univocity' between divine and human love, over against 'equivocity' of Being, again in striking parallel to a univocity of 'difference' in Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze: see *'De la "Mort de Dieu"'*, p. 130) add *any content at all* to a call already intuited according to the discourse of reason (philosophy = phenomenology) as

situated in distance? See also J-Y Lacoste, *'Penser à Dieu en L'Aimant,' Archives de Philosophe* 50. (1987) pp. 245–70. Lacoste points out that Heidegger never considers reading the ontological distance analogically (beings as 'like' Being) as another *possibility* and concludes that Marion too hastily takes Heidegger's ontology for granted. He then suggests that without an appeal to an 'analogy of being', Marion ignores the fact that we can only approach God as *love* by way of analogy to human love.

Heidegger's account of 'appropriation' cannot be taken as establishing a 'kenotic distance', since the 'self-withholding' of the ontic present in the giving of time/being involves a self-appropriation, or a withdrawing from unconcealment which is the 'vanishing' of the ontic into the nihil. See *On Time and Being*, pp. 22–3: 'Being vanishes in appropriation'; 'In true time, and its time-space, the giving of what has-been, that is, of what is not longer present, the denial of the present manifested itself. In the giving of the future, that is, of what is not yet present, the withholding of the present manifested itself.' 'Appropriation withdraws what is most fully its own from boundless unconcealment ... in that sense it expropriates itself of itself.'

49 *On Time and Being*, p. 20: 'destiny's gift of presence, the gift granted by the giving of time'; p. 22: 'the question we have advanced takes us back to what first of all demands its own determination: Being in terms of time.'

50 For Heidegger in *On Time and Being*, Being and Time mutually identify each other, Time being a matter of present 'now' and of ecstatic 'presence', Being comprises both that which is 'present' and that which is undisclosed as 'presence'. Being is 'given' by the double gift of time—'the reaching out' of the past, and the 'approaching' of the future (pp. 14–15)—and yet this 'giving' (Time) is *itself* given (p. 16). Both Being and Time are subject to the 'it gives', which means that just as there is in Being something which 'is' not, so Time is not itself temporal, but is the ecstatic belonging together of the three dimensions of Time. This would seem to open the way to acknowledgement of the transcendent, but the non-ontological character of the 'It' for Heidegger ties it firmly to the past and future moments of nullity. So just as Being itself 'is not', but is subject to an 'It gives' which is still somehow itself, so also Time as presence is not temporal (is not there, 'over' or 'approaching') and therefore is subject to an 'It gives time', which is still somehow time. Hence, in both cases 'Appropriation appropriates' and time and Being remain, despite the gift, 'their own', since a non-metaphysical discourse on Being as temporal says 'the same in terms of the same about the same' (p. 24). The manifestation of being *in its own terms*, supposedly allows phenomenology to fulfil the Parmenidean project free from metaphysical speculation, which cannot be stopped, but is 'left to itself'.

51 Marion, *God Without Being*, Preface, pp. xix–xxv.

52 Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, p. 13; Augustine, *De Trinitate*. I intend to expound elsewhere precisely what I do *not* believe that Augustine any more than Heidegger subordinates time to the psychic measure of time. It seems to me that for Augustine, as for Heidegger, human existence is the place where the reciprocal relationality of time becomes reflexive and 'apparent'. However, as Augustine grounds these relations not in themselves but in God, who is in one aspect 'mind', it is natural for him to see time as 'most itself' in mental activity. There is, nonetheless, no more 'humanism' here than in Heidegger, and their differences concern simply transcendent versus immanent resolutions of the temporal *aporias*. Peter Harris, in 'The Theology of *Zeit und Sein*' (unpublished), links the essay with Aquinas's account of the Trinity (Heidegger's likely source for the Augustinian view) but does not make the precise point I have made here. I am grateful to James Bradley for drawing my attention to this piece.

53 Marion, *Réduction et Donation*, pp. 62–63, 66, 90, 250, 252, 254. As Marion argues, Heidegger sought to separate the giving of a phenomenon from its Husserlian association with a present 'now' and concomitant Cartesian clarity.

54 Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur le Prisme Métaphysique de Descartes* (Paris, P.U.F. 1986) p. 42.

55 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), pp. 9–141.

56 I am grateful to Catherine Pickstock for drawing my attention to the crucial significance of the 'middle voice' in this regard.

57 This formulation, and all the immediately preceding diagnosis, is borrowed from Catherine Pickstock's unpublished writings.

58 Marion, *Réduction et Donation*, pp. 249–303.
59 See Bertrand Rioux, *'Une Métaphysique de L'Acte de l'Etre'*, *Les Études Philosophiques* (Jan-March 1980), pp. 47–55.
60 See Dominique Dubarle, *Dieu Avec l'Etre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), pp. 336–43.
61 Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 82.
62 See Rioux, *'Une Métaphysique'*, and J.H. Nicholas, *'La suprème logique de l'Amour et la théologie,' Revue Thomiste* 83 (1983), pp. 639–59.
63 See Nicholas. Marion (*God Without Being*, p. 216 n. 62) cites Thomas's commentary on Dionysius where he says that something is first comprehended as *ens* before it is comprehended as *unum*, *vivens* and *sapiens*. However, Aquinas goes on to say that this is because existing things can be one, living and wise *in themselves* and not by participation, but cannot *be* of themselves; *unde cum vita sit quoddam existens, vita etiam participat ipso esse* (in *librum De Divinis Nominibus*, p. 635; Caromello, p. 236). Of course this dependency with regard to Being reveals *also* a dependency with regard to unity, life and wisdom, but it is precisely our reception of Being which discloses this. Hence the 'primacy' of the name of 'Being', which does not imply an epistemological primacy of Being as the first thing for intellectual 'sight' (S.T. la Q5 a.2), Here *ens* is the first thing *conceived* by the intellect, since nothing can be thought at all unless it is. However, note first that the thing is *conceived*, not 'seen', so it is never a matter of the bare evidence of space, and the thing conceived will have 'to be' according to other transcendental necessities: unity, truth and beauty. Second, this is only according to the mode of intellection, which is always in the concrete accompanied by the mode of desiring, where goodness takes the lead. Third, the epistemological priority of *ens* is *not* transferred to ontological origination, for in the order of causes, of reasons for things *bonum* does indeed retain priority. Here Thomas concurs with Dionysius: see *ad I.*
64 See Edward Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Aquinas was only completing this shift, which Dionysius had already begun. As Booth says (p. 77), 'whereas being itself, life itself, and thought itself in Proclus were subordinated emanations from the One, Pseudo-Dionysius identified them with God ... God is the one who gives substance, the substantifier of every single existing thing, giving it total existence; everything pre-exists in him, participates in him, who is the exemplar of everything'. See also p. 53 where he cites Proclus as conceiving of Being always as a principle of *limit*.
65 Rainer Schürmann, *'L'henologie comme 'dépassement de la Métaphysique'*, *Les Études Philosophiques* (July–Sept. 1982), pp. 331–51.
66 J.W. and E. Leach (eds), *The Kula*.
67 See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 185–93, and Annette B. Wiener 'Trobriand Kinship'.
68 Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities*, p. 50.
69 Gregory, pp. 42, 71; Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972), pp. 231–46; Malinowski, *Argonauts*, pp. 167–94.
70 Deleuze and Guattari, loc. cit.
71 For the necessity for the 'Big man' to overcome the contradiction of needing to be first a big debtor in order to become later a big creditor by way of (a) production (b) varying velocities of exchange and (c) destructive sacrifice, see Gregory, pp. 61ff.
72 Deleuze and Guattari, loc. cit.; Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp. 148–56.
73 Davy, *La Foi Jureé*, pp. 33–81.
74 W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: A. and C. Black, 1927) pp. 318–9: 'The Hebrews, indeed, who had risen above the conception that the relation between Jehovah and Israel was that of natural kinship, thought of the national religion as constituted by a formal covenant sacrifice at Mount Sinai ... And by a further development of the same idea, every sacrifice is regarded in PS 1, 5 as a covenant between God and the worshipper.' And see pp. 312–9 in general. Also J.G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1923) p. 154. Purged of its evolutionary connotations, Robertson Smith's diagnosis remains valid.
75 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, in *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) pp. 141–177, does not really consider the tie of circumcision to blood covenant,

nor account for the *primacy* of this sign within Israel compared to other cultures, though one may agree with him that such primacy renders it no less 'savage'. His explanation for the primacy seems to be the priestly stress on covenant as descent over-against a Deuteronomic-prophetic reading of covenant as voluntary contract. However, this perpetrates a false opposition of priestly to prophetic which is part of the 'Christian' critical and anthropological heritage which his book rightly tries to dismantle, and fails to realise that circumcision as a mode of blood-covenant and as linked with the incest taboo concerns *in itself* covenant as 'free contract with the other'. The stress on Israel as a descent community is *inseparable* from the idea that it is also a community bound together by an exogamous rule, which indeed goes so far as *not* ruling out marriage-alliance with those outside Israel. The sign of circumcision does perhaps uphold patrilinear descent (whereas nothing in Christianity intrinsically does) but the significance of this for gender relations cannot be explored here. Nonetheless it should be noted that the fact that women are themselves often one of the most valuable 'gifts' does not necessarily render them passive objects, precisely because *the gift itself* was not an object, but imbued with subjectivity. On this see Annette B. Wiener, 'Trobriand Kinship'. Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift* (Berkeley: U.Cal. Press, 1988), is perhaps cautious about Wiener's position.

76 No-one seems to have commented on the incoherence of Derrida's appeal *both* to hieroglyphic writing (as more truly writing) *and* to Judaism as 'graphic' over against 'oral' Christianity, despite the semitic invention of alphabetic writing which is writing subordinate to speech. Derrida's suspicion of gift exchange is, of course, all of one piece with his suspicion of orality. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) pp. 1–95. One may read the Pentateuch itself as the outcome of a graphism that does not suppress orality: every linear development in verse, chapter, book and from book to book is brought back within a chiastic circle, so maintaining a movement, but insuring that it is a spiraling movement, and that the 'advance' of history is merely a part of the never completed *reditus* to God, one side of the eternal circle whose other aspect is *exitus* from God. The work of Jacob Milgrom would seem to destroy any overdrawn contrasts between Hellenic circularity and Hebraic linearity. See: J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: J.P.S.A., 1990), and Mary Douglas, 'The Glorious Book of Numbers' (forthcoming).

77 I am grateful to Paul Morris, of Lancaster University, for these points concerning money in the *Mishnah*.

78 See Edward Westermarck, *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, Vol. I (London: A. and C. Black, 1926), chap. 23. Despite the asservations of some, it is clear that there is great continuity between the almsgiving practice of Jesus and the early church. I am indebted to Will Lamb, of Westcott House, Cambridge, for his unpublished essay on this topic.

79 See Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), pp. 70–84; *Leviticus*, ed. Baruch A. Levine (Philadelphia: J.P.S.A., 1989), pp. xiii ff. and commentaries on chapters 1 and 2. And above all Mary Douglas, 'The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus,' *JSOT* 59 (Sept. 1993), pp. 3–23, in which she largely abandons her previous position which interpreted the purity codes as establishing the 'external boundary of the community' and reads them instead as *uniquely* establishing inclusivity, outside all boundaries; blood and blemish are only tabooed because they are associated with the intrusion of both cosmic and social injustice since the Fall. Thus they are associated either with predation or suffering *from* predation and for *this* reason cannot be offered to God. (This implies emphatically that women are *not* for the Old Testament a source of uncleanness, but rather victims of cosmic injustice). Thus Douglas sums up her revolutionary conclusions: 'This so-called purity code only looks superficially like purity codes in other parts of the world: it has none of the usual political uses, and is primarily a code of justice and honour' (p. 23). 'Everywhere else taboo is specifically tied to behaviour in such a way as to protect valued social and moral standards' (p. 2), whereas 'Levitical impurity is a fact of biology, common to all persons, and also a result of specific moral offences that anyone is liable to commit such as lying or stealing ... Biblical impurity is of no use in demarcating advantaged social classes or ranks ... In effect Biblical defilement is a cerebral creation, it has no philosophical uses, it does not accuse ... It is part of a philosophy of Being' (pp. 7–8). I do not need to underline the relevance of the last remark, which suggests that Biblical impurity already is the negative, violent and *privated*, and that a full blown (ontological)

privation doctrine is truly of Biblical inspiration. As for the questions this suggests concerning Christian attitudes to *Torah*, that is, for now, too big an issue ...

80 Gregory, pp. 206–9.

81 Ritual gift-exchange remained, however, crucial in Greek practices of friendship and benefaction, and these in turn still impacted crucially upon the economic and political spheres. Such a situation persisted through the late antique and into the Byzantine era, but there was no longer a fully-fledged Greek, Byzantine or Roman gift economy, as amongst the northern barbarians whom they encountered: see Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), pp. 3–18.

82 Derrida, *Given Time I*, pp. 158–9 and 137–8.

83 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, 10.

84 See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 131–55.

85 See Dominique Dubarle, *Dieu Aven l'Etre*, pp. 343–61.

86 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, pp. 613–57.

87 Balthasar, loc cit., and *The Glory of the Lord IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, pp. 393–412. Although for Aquinas 'the real distinction' between *esse* and essence is 'in' the creature and constitutive of it, this is really to say that man is constituted not just by his created essence but by the ever renewed participation of this essence in the Being of God. Hence the real distinction is also the distance between man and God, man himself existing as this distance.

88 See Michael Barnes, *The Power of God: The Significance of Dunamis in the Development of Gregory of Nyssa's Polemic against Eunomios of Cyzicus*, (unpublished Toronot PhD. thesis). In this brilliant and crucial study, Barnes argues that *dynamis* (following Cor 1:24 and pagan philosophical sources) was as crucial a site for Trinitarian and Christological controversies as *ousia*. See pp. 465ff for his account of the Cappadocian initial assertion of 'one *dynamis*' in relation to Father and Son, but later, also, of 'one *energeia*' (act) in relation to the equality of the Spirit. And see pp. 475ff for his account of the fate of *dynamis* as *virtus* in Latin theology.