

GIFT THEORY AND THE BOOK OF JOB

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Gift theory offers a new perspective on the book of Job: God favors a universal gift ethic, Satan opts for an alienable gift economics, while Job's friends endorse the principle of balanced reciprocity. The article depicts Job conflicted over the divine love culture and the culture promoted by his friends and Satan, but in the end celebrating a life-giving gift practice and advocating genuine reconciliation between God and humans, and between a wounded individual and his enemies.

CENTRAL TO THE BOOK OF JOB are five burning questions: (1) the justifiability of God in allowing a good man to suffer;¹ (2) the controversy over retributive justice; (3) the value of human suffering; (4) the nature of the whirlwind revelations; (5) the significance of the restoration scene and why Elihu is not punished. The first part of my article gives a general view of the scholarly debates on these questions. The second part uses gift theory to reread the Joban drama, arguing that the book of Job aims not at foregrounding the predicament of humans but at a groundbreaking understanding of the divine gift practice. My thesis is that the book of Job is written out of a strong thematic interest in the divine/human logic of gift exchange, and is primarily devoted to exposing the various hidden notions of gift ethics at work when the human mind is in agony. In this context, a dialogue with the anthropological perspective of the gift and the contemporary deconstructionist reading of the "free" gift can systematically advance our understanding of the book itself: the differences between God and Satan,² and between Job and his friends.

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¹ Because English has no generic singular—common-sex—pronoun, I have used the generic marker "he" when referring to God. It goes without saying that the use of masculine pronouns does not reflect the gender character of God in the text.

² A reviewer points out that even though most Bible translations use the word

Throughout the centuries, scholars have offered various interpretations of the book of Job that lead to either extremely optimistic or pessimistic conclusions. On the one hand, optimists such as Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas firmly uphold the opinion that the Joban adventure is a benign, well-controlled project that attests the thoughtfulness of God, the unsustainability of retributive doctrines, the importance of fortitude, the transience of suffering, the certainty of God's generous rewards, and the presence of evil for the benefit of humankind. On the other hand, pessimists such as Margaret Crook, David Clines, and Carol Newsom highlight the Joban misadventure as a cruel, unsolicited experiment that affirms the notion of cosmic insensitivity, the subordination of human welfare for a supernatural wager, the imminence of evil, the helplessness of Job, the unreliability of friends, the absurdity of fortitude in the wheel of fortune (which preserves the wicked and impoverishes the just), the authoritarianism of God's final "explanation," and the secret endorsement of the retributive principle. Moreover, the "restoration scene" also raises the Kantian question of goodwill: if the experiment aims at foregrounding the integrity of Job, the emphasis on materialistic consolation would seem like an anticlimactic affirmation of doing good for one's self-interest. However, if the entire epilogue is ignored, the suffering of Job would call into question God's distributive justice.

A brief overview of the different interpretations can tell us why the book of Job arouses such diverse critical responses. On the question of divine justice, one can discern four different positions: (1) The typical position is not to explain the heavenly rationale.³ (2) Justifiability is not an issue, because it is within God's "divine right" to dispose of his creatures according to his unfathomable wisdom. Samuel Cox, for example, simply concludes that there is no need to "question either the justice or the kindness of God."⁴ (3) Scholars such as Bernhard Duhm, Normal Habel, and David Clines argue that the arbitrary imposition of suffering on Job is unjustifiable. Habel, for example, writes: "The way in which God agrees to test Job's integrity raises serious doubts about God's own integrity. He is apparently vulnerable to incitement by Satan in his heavenly council. He succumbs to a wager—twice. . . . He afflicts Job without cause or provoca-

"Satan," the proper translation of the Hebrew should be "the satan." The Hebrew word is not a proper noun or a name; instead, it aims at defining "the satan" in terms of its positional difference (i.e. "the function of adversary"). For the sake of consistency, I have retained the Jerusalem Bible's version of the word. My biblical quotations are taken from the Jerusalem Bible.

³ David J. A. Clines, "Job's Fifth Friend: An Ethical Critique of The Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004) 239.

⁴ Samuel Cox, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1880) 23.

tion, and his capacity to rule justly is thrown into question."⁵ (4) The argument represented by commentators such as Gregory the Great, John Edgar McFadyen, and Marvin Pope allocates the question of justifiability to Satan. He is responsible for launching the "sadistic experiment" to see if Job "had a breaking point."⁶ He causes Job's suffering, making "the most unscrupulous use of the terrifying resources at his disposal."⁷ When there is a battle between the Old Enemy of God and humankind, Gregory believes that the format (wager) is not an important issue in the debate of justifiability. Drawing on an analogy between Job's involuntary agony and Christ's voluntary suffering, Gregory declares that, whatever the cause (wager or moral will), affliction does not compromise God's justice, for God is always working for the greater, not immediate, interests of humankind.⁸ In turn, Satan's unjustified evil can only bring to completion God's goodness. Thomas Aquinas proclaims that Job's suffering is a "blessed" adversity—"so that his virtue should be made manifest to all."⁹

Leave aside the heavenly scene; the quarrel over retributive justice between Job and his friends becomes the center of another debate. The retribution theory is convenient, for it can explain (away) the cause of human suffering with "divine mathematics."¹⁰ While the notion of retribution implies that "the good is rewarded, the bad punished," there are actually two aspects to the concept of retributive justice: destructive and constructive. The former focuses on punishment and denotes a causal linkage between disasters and a violation of moral laws; thus, suffering implies God's punishment and revenge. The latter focuses on rewards: either the good person is always rewarded, or an apology or some repentant gesture from the miscreant appeases God's anger. Therefore, constructive retributive justice leads to the restoration of good fortune. It is on this dualistic understanding of retribution that critics tend to differ. Job's friends operate out of constructive retributive justice, arguing that God will not inflict pain on an evildoer; hence Job must have sinned and must repent to regain his prosperity. Job's insistence on his innocence, however, presents a strong case against the theory of destructive retributive justice. He refuses to align

⁵ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1985) 61.

⁶ Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) lxxiv.

⁷ John Edgar McFadyen, *The Problem of Pain: A Study in the Book of Job* (London: James Clarke, 1917) 20.

⁸ See Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988) 62.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 83.

¹⁰ Clines, "Job's Fifth Friend" 234, quoting Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (Nashville: Nelson, 1967) cxxxiv.

his suffering with divine wrath, and he emphasizes that he will not repent for any reason. In that light, most commentators who argue for Job's blamelessness and against the theory of destructive retribution believe that suffering is essentially a mystery and not a punitive gesture. Rosemary Dewey, for example, shows how Job challenges retribution by highlighting the fact that the innocent do suffer, while the bad go unpunished. Our world has a capricious moral order, "a magnificent universe created and controlled by a God who is beyond human comprehension and who cannot be forced into human structures of logic and justice."¹¹ Meanwhile, critics who endorse the theory of constructive retribution tend to argue for the friends' logic on the ground that Job *did* apologize to God in order to regain his fortune.¹² Alexander Whyte says Job is not without sin, though his sins refer to the universal condition of humankind: "The truth is: Job is both guilty and not guilty, Job is both clean and vile."¹³ Newsom says the book of Job affirms the constructive retributive principle in this way: "Though the friends are rebuked for having spoken what is not correct, a simple check shows that in fact things turn out just as they had predicted. When Job reorients himself toward God and puts the 'iniquity' of his arrogant words aside, God turns to him in kindness, removes his misery, and restores him to a life in which he 'rests secure.'"¹⁴

My opinion on this interpretation is twofold: First, though Job has certainly removed his "arrogant words," a careful examination reveals that he has apologized for a different reason. Job does not repent, as his friends say, for his "sins," but for his ignorance of God's mysterious ways and power. Second, given that God has never been angry with Job and responded to his words prior to his apology (for God is honored by Job's faithfulness), whether this apology is vital to the restoration of his fortune is a matter of debate.

If suffering is not for divine retribution, what is its value? Clines says Job's suffering is entirely needless. Simone Weil believes that unjustified suffering and ill-humored sympathy/accusations can often lead a good person to despair. Job's moral certainty is gradually reduced to a solipsistic resistance, while the friends' reiteration of Job's "wickedness" and God's justice degenerates into an empty generality. Under such circumstances, Dorothee Soelle valorizes an existentialist view of suffering and summons

¹¹ Rosemary Dewey, "Qoheleth and Job: Diverse Responses to the Enigma of Evil," *Spirituality Today* 37 (Winter 1985) 320.

¹² For example, David J. A. Clines says, "it appears to be the position of the friends, not of Job nor even of the voice from the whirlwind, that triumphs in the end" ("Job's Fifth Friend" 247).

¹³ Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: Ahithophel to Nehemiah* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1900) 119.

¹⁴ Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University, 2003) 20.

one to confront pain or angst with a "radical acceptance."¹⁵ Optimists, however, present more positive views on the value of suffering. One view suggests that Job suffers for God. Reading the book of Job through a christological lens, Gregory argues that Job's suffering foreshadows Christ's passion to fight for God's cause. Job is like a stoic warrior who can defend God's name and withstand the attacks of a changing fortune. A second interpretation foregrounds a humanistic view, maintaining that Job suffers for the glory of humanity, thereby witnessing to heaven and hell that humans can be faithful. Samuel Cox notes that Job "was being put to the proof in order . . . that all the hierarchy of heaven might be convinced of man's capacity for a sincere and genuine piety."¹⁶ However, most commentators uphold a third opinion, namely, that the ultimate value of Job's suffering is for the "transformation" of Job himself. Aquinas proposes that Job begins as a Stoic who does not care about worldly losses; he is then moved to endorse the views of the Peripatetics with a pain-induced, tearful lamentation. Finally, Job ends as a rational Neoplatonist who does not place "the ultimate remuneration for virtue in temporal goods but in spiritual goods after this life."¹⁷ James Anthony Froude points out that Job suffers in order to re-form his association of good man with good fortune, knowing that this view cannot cover "all the facts of human life."¹⁸ Newsom argues that the book of Job is composed like a *Bildungsroman* to mirror Job's "changed perception."¹⁹

For some critics, the whirlwind revelation answers many questions; for others, it generates even more unanswerable questions. A negative reading of the whirlwind speech sees God's answer as too vague and too didactic. In James Strahan's view, God has not explained the "ultimate mysteries" of suffering.²⁰ Clines believes that the whirlwind episode reveals God's high-handed approach: God dwells on his management policy of Earth to avoid dealing with Job's grievances.²¹ Newsom singles out God's "authoritative word," for he refuses to entertain any dialogical sense of truth. Thus the whirlwind revelation can only reaffirm the monologic discourse of fundamentalism. God's reply ends the postmodern hope of polyphonic confusion, suggesting that "the truth about piety, human suffering, the

¹⁵ Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 107.

¹⁶ Cox, *Commentary on the Book of Job* 238.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Literal Exposition on Job* 406.

¹⁸ James Anthony Froude, "Essay on Job," as cited by Cox, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, 12.

¹⁹ Newsom, *Book of Job* 20.

²⁰ James Strahan, *The Book of Job Interpreted* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913) 14.

²¹ See Clines, "Job's Fifth Friend" 243.

nature of God, and the moral order of the cosmos can be adequately addressed only by a plurality of unmerged consciousness engaging one another in open-ended dialogue."²²

However, those who favor a positive reading of the whirlwind speech suggest that God's answer can be definite and permissive. The speech gives Job an indirect but definite reply to his previous accusation of divine indifference. God tells Job explicitly that all things, even his pain, are under God's control, an assurance echoed in Julian of Norwich's mystical saying, "All shall be well." In turn, God reveals to Job his "management vision": God has founded the Earth, and all creatures are a part of the great chain of being. However, each creature is allowed to maximize its self-interests while heeding God's plan of harmonious coexistence. For example, the mountainous region is free for many wild beasts, but the unruly Behemoth is to hide "among the reeds in the swamps" (40:21). Such a world system does not follow a symbolic, mathematical order but a shambolic fusion of freedom, self-will, and legal consciousness. It shows no sign of totalitarianism, because God sustains the life of obedient as well as violent/resistant creatures, and he tolerates radical differences. Thus Gustavo Gutiérrez suggests that the meeting of a caring God and a dissenting Job signifies not the elimination of dialogues but "the mysterious meeting of two freedoms."²³

It does not take long for one to realize that, though the commentators' approaches and conclusions differ, their studies function like an appeals tribunal reviewing the Joban claim in either a sympathetic or hostile manner, thereby demonstrating a classic judicial interpretive tradition when approaching the text. The average critic focuses his or her perspective by identifying with one of several possible voices: God's, Job's, the critic's personal belief, or one of the current ethical/moral discourses. Though everyone knows that there is no effective means of enforcing judgments against God or Satan, critics choose to re-present Job's case, argue about his aggrieved state, and weigh the justifiability of the actant's behavior (a right conduct? an unjustified deed? or the whole issue is actually unrelated to the actant—in this case, God?). Critics debate on the actant's motivation (retribution or mystery), comment on the victim's experience and reaction ("needless" suffering, a despairing journey, a glorious defense of integrity), and reconstruct the whirlwind scene (a meeting that sidesteps the main issue versus a constructive encounter that puts things back into perspective). Finally, critics evaluate the "compensatory" deal settled between the actant and the victim. This "tribunal approach" is understandably popular,

²² Newsom, *Book of Job* 24.

²³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987) 198.

for the courtroom scenario is very much at the heart of the Joban drama. For example, the book is structured as a three-part arbitration process: God in his heavenly court sanctions the test to be carried out on Job; Job, in his ashpit senate, fights and vetoes the judgment of his friends; God in the whirlwind adjudicates the ultimate distribution of rewards. However, to read the book of Job as a "judicial study" (God against humans, humans against humans, Job against the Law, or the commentators for or against all of the above positions) is to misunderstand the whole idea of creation, the purpose of living a life, the nature of the Law, and the notion of a community embedded in the message of the book of Job. Rather than a judicial reading, I want to use gift theory to foreground the difference and the disagreement between God and Satan, and between Job and his friends on the notions of gift bestowal, gift exchange, and gift scarcity, while arguing that the purpose of the experiment is not for the torture or reward of humankind but for a deeper understanding of gift economics and "divine gift practices."

GIFT THEORY

Human gift practice was succinctly captured by Marshall Sahlins in 1972: "if friends make gifts, gifts make friends."²⁴ However, gift theory dates back to 1925 when Marcel Mauss studied why people give gifts and how gifts can create and solidify social relations, forging "a bilateral, irrevocable bond" between the donor and the recipient.²⁵ He noticed that even though gifts are "free" and voluntary, they generate a sense of debt and contractual obligations, so much so that each social member recognizes a duty "to give, to receive, to reciprocate." Since then, several models have been put forward to explain the phenomenon of gift exchange and the links between the donor and the recipient, leading to a growing argument over the possibility of a "free gift."

Marcel Mauss, Annette Weiner, and Maurice Godelier all favor the "spirit model" to explain the origin of the gift. For Mauss, *hau* is a Maori spirit that lies in the object given by one person to another. Wanting to return to its origin, *hau* fosters an ongoing "giving" culture among humans and will punish offenders who fail to reciprocate the gift. Hence *hau* defends the "ancient morality of the gift" and makes it a "principle of justice." Mauss calls this the "spirit of the gift."²⁶ On the relationship between the

²⁴ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972) 186.

²⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990) 18, 33.

²⁶ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967) 8.

donor and the recipient, Mauss repeatedly “stresses a *combination* of interest and disinterest, of freedom and constraints, in the gift.”²⁷ Similarly Charles Hinnant points out that the Judeo-Christian tradition also embraces the giving/sharing culture due to the spirit of God, the first gift-giver. As God cannot be fully repaid, all exchanges are various “versions of the unremittable debt that humans owe to God for the gift of life; all other gifts—whether between kin, between strangers, or between individuals and their own communities—are simply faint echoes of this original endowment.”²⁸ The spirit of gratitude begins the gift cycle out of love (what Georg Simmel calls the “moral memory of mankind”) as well as out of an acknowledgment of inadequate reciprocal interaction.²⁹ As a result, the Christian practice goes beyond the *hau*’s particularistic notion of justice: the gift not only goes back to the sender, but also goes to faraway places to enrich the lives of many brothers and sisters. It transcends the negative notion of giving (that is, to ward off supernatural punishment). Charity, with its unreciprocated gift, is a positive “denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation.”³⁰

In this light, the gift is an antidote to the market, for it comes from the spirit and upholds a system of relationships that cannot be reduced to factors of power or economic interest. Later, instead of *hau*, “inalienability” becomes a key concept to explain the interiority of the Spirit in gifts to refute the exchange paradigm. Not all gifts can be quantified, and not all gift relations can be reciprocated (or expunged) for the simple reason that inalienable objects form identities. As Annette Weiner observes, a gift becomes inalienable when it produces an “exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time.”³¹ Items such as divine relics or family heirlooms bespeak the existence of a superbeing that confers the objects or identities to humans, and “keeps-while-giving” these attributes to humans.³² The tie between donor and recipient cannot be severed because, through the gift, the donor’s presence is embedded in the

²⁷ Jonathan Parry, “*The Gift, the Indian gift, and the ‘Indian gift,’*” *Man*, n.s. 21 (1986) 456 (emphasis original).

²⁸ Mark Osteen, “Introduction,” in *The Question of the Gift: Essays across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002) 12.

²⁹ Georg Simmel explains that the first gift can never really be returned, as it has a “freedom which the return gift, because it is *that*, cannot possibly possess” (“Faith and Gratitude,” in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke Komter [Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 1996] 47 [emphasis original]).

³⁰ Parry, “*The Gift, the Indian gift, and the ‘Indian gift,’*” 468.

³¹ Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992) 33. C. A. Gregory coined the concept “inalienable objects”; see his *Gifts and Commodities* (New York: Academic, 1982) 43.

³² *Ibid.* 12.

recipient's subjectivity. Weiner points out that inalienable possessions cannot be sold, because they contain an absolute value not to be detached from the original owner.³³ Godelier proposes that in addition to the three duties ("to give, to receive, to reciprocate"), there should be a fourth obligation, "to make gifts to gods."³⁴ Sacred gifts or objects, either once presented to gods or given to us by ancestors or gods, define a person's being or a clan's identity and therefore become unrepayable. As inalienable gifts may not be in the form of objects (such as the gift of tongues in Pentecostal churches), Mark Osteen argues that the gift's spiritual nature and the immaterial "aura" must not be ignored.³⁵

Unlike the spirit model, the reciprocity model critiques the Maussian gift by demystifying it in the light of debt, repayment, and economism. Bronislaw Malinowski believes that gifts are primitive forms of market exchange; hence all rights and obligations are "arranged into well-balanced chains of reciprocal services."³⁶ As Yunxiang Yan describes it, "one gives because of the expectation of return and one returns because of the threat that one's partner may stop giving."³⁷ The utilitarian reciprocity cements relationships and welcomes calculation in investment. Thus, Sahlins formulates his famous ideas of "generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity, negative reciprocity" to demystify the "spirit" of the gift. Generalized reciprocity exists in the family circle, as its demand for obligatory returns is implicit and long-lasting. Negative reciprocity typifies the exchanges among acquaintances, as it emphasizes use-value, nonreturn, or exploitation. Balanced reciprocity is the most widely accepted mode of gift exchange. While people tend to maintain equity in transactions, the emotional bond between the parties determines the value of the counter-gift. In this light, gift practices become a "moral economy,"³⁸ a "love trade," a system of transaction or a circle of reciprocation through which utilitarian ties are defined, class hierarchies or calculation are recognized, and self-interests are heightened.

A third model, the libidinal, focuses on the state of spontaneous "fullness" in which the giver "can't help" giving. Feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Genevieve Vaughan denounce the reciprocity model, saying that patriarchal logic has reduced all affective exchanges to the economy of

³³ Ibid. 13.

³⁴ Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999) 13.

³⁵ Osteen, "Gift or Commodity" in *Question of the Gift* 244.

³⁶ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1962) 46.

³⁷ Yunxiang Yan, "Unbalanced Reciprocity" in Osteen, *Question of the Gift* 67.

³⁸ David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 15.

debt and lack.³⁹ Women are by nature gift-givers and life-nurturers, thus they can in no way relate their spontaneous giving to calculation and constraint. (Perhaps that is why the gift is labeled by Jacques Godbout to be "the special domain" of woman.⁴⁰) On the other hand, Lewis Hyde cites the example of artistic production and the poet, noting that poetry manifests an "emanation of eros."⁴¹ Being in high emotional distress, the poet voices his sorrowful lamentations, for he is "compelled to make the work and offer it to an audience." When a person is in a gifted state, to "proclaim or perish" becomes "an internal demand of the creative spirit."⁴² It is hoped that the gifts of articulation can create a cycle so that the audience, which shares the artist's imagination, can reproduce the same creativity without appealing to calculation (the logic of market exchange). Eventually, Hyde suggests, this spontaneous chain of gifts will come back to reward the giver (artist) many times over. The release of powerful imagination activates the artistic flow of "recreation, conversion or renaissance."⁴³

GOD: THE GIFT PARADIGM

The debate between what Osteen calls the "Scylla of sentimentality and the Charybdis of economism" in gift theory not only mirrors the fundamental differences between the altruistic mindset and the exchange paradigm,⁴⁴ but also allows us to understand the great divide at the opening of the book of Job. The assumption behind the quarrel in the prologue is not so much about the human capacity of faithfulness, but quintessentially about the different notions of gift economy between God and Satan. God has no difficulty in distinguishing the true gift from commodity/service exchanges, or separating his gift paradigm from Satan's market rhetoric. Unlike Satan's quasi-neoclassical schemata, in which all relationships can be quantified by cost-benefit analysis, and "all values are commensurable, objectively measurable, and alienable,"⁴⁵ God single-handedly establishes

³⁹ Hence Cixous asks, "Who could ever think of the gift as a gift-that-takes? . . . Who else but man, precisely the one who would like to take everything?" ("The Laugh of the Medusa," in *The Critical Tradition: Classical Text and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter [New York: St. Martin's, 1989] 1099.) See also Genevieve Vaughan, *For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange* (Austin, Tex.: Plain View, 1997).

⁴⁰ Jacques Godbout with Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1998) 36.

⁴¹ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (London: Vintage, 1983) 22. To Hyde, the gift economy helps erase borders while the market economy only solidifies boundaries.

⁴² *Ibid.* 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 193.

⁴⁴ Osteen, *Question of the Gift* 31.

⁴⁵ See Osteen, "Gift or Commodity" 231. He notes that "neoclassicals such as

qualitative gifts, values, and relationships that are nonfungible and inalienable. To understand God's gift paradigm, we must read the book backwards, for it is in the whirlwind speech (and in the New Testament) that we can grasp the divine way of gift bestowal: the presentation of *inalienable* gifts, the *free* gift, the *perfect* gift, and the perfectly *abnormal* gift.

The inalienable gifts that God gives the world are essentially the gifts of creation/life and cosmological and moral order. Like most inalienable possessions, the recipients can never fully repay the giver for the simple reason that the gifts carry with them some "surplus value" that are beyond repayment. God's gifts are qualified by two forms of inalienability: first, on the level of formation, the gifts define the recipients' constitution and status and confer a dependent relationship (like a genetic trait or a family heirloom) that rules out exchange, commodification, and, most importantly, repudiation. For example, God's presence may not be felt, but the foundation of the Earth, the morning stars, and the sea can never be dissociated from the original owner. With God's rhetorical questions ("Who decided the dimensions of [the earth]?" "Who stretched the measuring line across it?" "Who gave the wild donkey his freedom?" [38:5, 6; 39:5]), God implies that his gifts help build the world and fashion the identity of an animal or a person. The immaterial, constitutional links between the Creator and his creatures annul the market logic by which relationships can become reified and alienable. Second, on the level of recognition, inalienable gifts are conferred on creatures, but they are never really given away. For example, humans are given life, but life is merely on loan while God retains ultimate ownership of it. Only God can negotiate with "the gates of Death" (38:17). Another example is that one can accept or reject God's moral ideas by acknowledging or refusing his way of striking "down the wicked where they stand," making the proud person "low" (40:12). However, these moral signifiers (right/wrong, just/unjust, rights/obligation, good/wicked, humble/haughty) will always retain the "aura" of God. Hence, no ethical discourse can avoid dealing with God's configuration of humankind with its inalienable right to life and liberty. Even though theorists keep revolutionizing these moral signifiers, and scientists keep reinterpreting cosmological history, these moral notions are like precious gifts that can change hands or be reshaped by one person or another, but one cannot totally remove the imprint of the original inventor. Modern medicine may, at very high cost and with immense suffering, add "a single cubit to [a patient's] span of life" (Lk 12:25), but God has the final say on that person and his or her moment

Gary Becker and legal theorists such as Richard Posner employ market rhetoric to paint a caricatured picture of human relations." For these theorists, eventually "even babies and body parts are fungible items." Gift exchange is "just an alias for self-interest."

of death. As God “keeps-while-giving” his Spirit in the gifts given to humans, these inalienable possessions remind us of God’s presence and act as a stabilizing force against change, because they authenticate the origins of life itself and our moral bearings. God’s gifts can always defy market ideologies and prioritize the binding relations between the unchanging God and unstable, evolving humans.

In addition to inalienable gifts, God also gives humans free gifts. If Jacques Derrida (and, later, Rodolphe Gasché) argues that humans are not capable of giving free gifts,⁴⁶ the book of Job reveals that God alone can unquestionably fulfill Derrida’s four criteria of what constitutes a “free gift.” God can give a gift that is characterized by: (1) the condition of no reciprocity (Derrida suggests that any return would mean an economic cycle, an interested exchange that includes calculation, interest, etc.); (2) the recipient’s ignorance (to preclude a sense of debt or obligatory return, the recipient must not know the gifts are gifts or his or her status as a recipient); (3) the donor’s disinterested, self-forgetting generosity (to avoid using gifts as a means of praising oneself or extracting praise from others, the donor “must also forget it right away”; the failure to do so would make gift-giving an act of bad faith for sheer self-gratification); (4) the thing cannot exist as a gift at all. As Derrida puts it, “the simple identification of the passage of a gift . . . would be nothing other than the destruction of the gift”—“for there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift.”⁴⁷ God, in the book of Job, reveals that he gives many kinds of gifts to the world. The “normative gifts” (e.g., cattle, servants) given to Job are loaded with love on the donor’s part and are reciprocated by Job’s gratitude; Job knows full well that he is a person blessed with innumerable possessions. In this sense, while God’s behavior fits our notion of free-giving (it is not said that Job asks God for these gifts), it fails to be a Derridean “free gift,” because the giving generates

⁴⁶ The fourth model—if it can be counted as one—the deconstructionist, argues that there can be no gift in life. In *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) Derrida uses his deconstructionist approach to align the gift with the transcendental signified/meta-object, and the symbolic enterprise with market economism. He concludes that there cannot be any gift, least of all free gifts. Economy, like language, “implies the idea of exchange, of circulation, of return” (6). But “for there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt” (12). In short, a gift is defined to be “a point of presence” that encourages absolute, exsystemic giving, to be contrasted with market exchange, the symbolic play of difference. For Derrida, the gift functions as an exsystemic object that starts the symbolic (market) exchange. The gift is useful in that it gets the system going, but it is fundamentally exterior to the system. Hence, he says the gift is (like God to him) a concept that is “impossible” but not “unthinkable.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 14, 16.

gratitude, praise, acknowledgement, and the "economic cycle" of interested returns.

However, the "anomic gifts" God bestowed on the world can undoubtedly fit the category of free gifts. No one knows why God created a world with a planetary order ("given orders to the morning," "guide the morning star season by season," "makes provision for the raven" [38:12, 32, 41]), then added such serious disruptions as the Behemoth, Leviathan, hailstorms, and thunder, leaving humans in a state of bewilderment about the world's teleology. While everyone presumes that sheep, oxen, and camels are among God's gifts to humans, few would count the Behemoth and Leviathan among them (though, in fact, they are). In its pure being-in-and-for-itself, the Behemoth is totally ignorant of its life as being indebted to God; hence it offers no obligatory return. In fact, the Behemoth's nature is so violent that it cannot recognize God, and God has to threaten him with his "sword" (40:19), thus creating a most interesting relationship between the donor and the recipient.

The defiance of market rationality cannot be more evident than in the case of the Leviathan. The Leviathan does not exist in the form of a gift, and it can never exist as a marketable gift to humans or to God. Thus God asks Job, "Will you make a pet of him, like a bird, keep him on a lead to amuse your maids? Is he to be sold by the fishing guild and then retailed by the merchants?" (40:29-31). Given that the Leviathan is "the king" of "all the sons of pride" (41:26), God naturally does not praise himself or extract praise from others for creating such a monster. With immense resourcefulness, God sends rain as both "useful" and "useless" gifts to water the plants as well as the desert wastes. He gives the lioness wisdom to nourish her whelps, but he also allows the carefree ostrich to be "unwise" and simply leave her eggs on the ground (39:14). If the deconstructionists say that there is no free gift due to either market or psychological economism,⁴⁸ God's gifts can be free because many of them are anomic, ateleological, and, therefore, unrecognized in the human sense. But God does not care for recognition, and in any case humans seldom notice his generosity (which only endorses James Laidlaw's words: "a free gift makes no friends."⁴⁹ Job is said to be an exception: "There is no one like him on the earth" [1:8]). Since the donor does not trumpet his liberality, and the

⁴⁸ That is, gifts are not truly gifts for they create a cycle of debt, repayment, self-praising recognition, and interested calculation. Gifts are for the defense of a teleological, symbolic exchange, i.e., to settle accounts, maintain equilibrium.

⁴⁹ In James Laidlaw's words, "religious charity and philanthropy love the supreme value of the anonymous donation, but only to find that time and again donors have been more attached to the benefits of the socially entangling Maussian gift, which does make friends" ("A Free Gift Makes No Friends," in *Question of the Gift*, 63).

gifts are indifferent to the category of “normative gifts,” they are not counted as gifts by all, and they generate no calculation of debt, no thought of repayment, no complacency in the donor, and no gratitude in the recipient. What stands out is God’s communitarian, all “for-giving culture.”⁵⁰ In fact, his gifting borders on the notion of a life-bursting “excess” or “wastes.”⁵¹ And his ultimate gift is simply the “gift of giving” itself.⁵² In that light, God singularly defies economism and loves community—the Trinity consists of three persons, not one, and God gives rain to the just and unjust alike. The difference between the two gift consciousnesses could not be more pronounced. In Vaughan’s words: “Living in a market-based society makes us think of all bonds in terms of exchange, of debt and repayment, however the bonds which are established through gift giving are positive and life-enhancing in contrast to onerous debt and responsibility.”⁵³

To consolidate community consciousness, God also gives “perfect gifts” to cultivate intimacy and inculcate humanity so that humans can function in community and attain communion with God. In the Old Testament, God delivers his perfect gifts in the form of external markers, that is, the covenant and the ark. These gifts help establish a shared culture and a close communicative contact between heaven and earth. Through these markers, the Israelites are singled out to be God’s citizens, and the laws are coded for the wise governance of the community and themselves. These gifts accord with the secular, perfect gift described by Russell Belk: “The perfect gift involves sacrifice and altruism (the giver must give of him- or herself), so that, far from being unconstrained, its aim is to imbricate the donor in social relations. Second, the gift must not be an object needed for mere sustenance and must be appropriate for the recipient (food gifts should be fancy fruit or candy, not bags of potatoes). . . . Finally, the perfect gift must surprise and delight the recipient (presumably because of its appropriateness and luxuriousness).”⁵⁴

As the tabernacle marks the altruistic presence of God while he guides and protects his people, it cannot fail to surprise and delight when a cloud rested “on the tabernacle by day, and a fire shone within the cloud by night, for all the House of Israel to see” (Exod 40:38). Job is also said to be

⁵⁰ To use the words of Genevieve Vaughan. See Vaughan, *For-Giving*.

⁵¹ Cf. “God . . . clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace” (Lk 12:28).

⁵² Derrida, *Given Time* 290.

⁵³ Genevieve Vaughan, “Introduction to the Gift Economy” (2004), <http://www.gift-economy.com/theory.html> (accessed August 15, 2005).

⁵⁴ Quoted in Osteen, “Gift or Commodity” 231. See also Russell Belk, “The Perfect Gift,” in *Gift-Giving: A Research Anthology*, ed. Cele Otnes and Richard F. Beltramini (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular, 1996) 59–84.

blessed by God's perfect gifts. As Rosemary Dewey notes, "Job had what seemed a perfect number and distribution of children (seven sons and three daughters) and so many animals that he was considered 'the greatest of all the men of the east'" (1:3).⁵⁵

However, the highest form of gift-giving is succinctly summed up by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his radical 1844 essay "Gifts": "The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me."⁵⁶ Odd though it may be, "bleeding" makes a perfect gift as well as a perfectly "abnormal" gift, because it demonstrates not only an altruistic consciousness, but also a distinctive knowledge of goodness on the part of the subject. It signifies the subject's complete autonomy and freedom, for the subject actively chooses to bleed for the other. Undoubtedly, God gives Jesus as his ultimate perfectly abnormal gift to humans so that humans can have full communion with God. And in turn, while God gives Jesus as a gift, Jesus also presents his "abnormal" gift to humans—the Cross. As the Cross belongs to the category of "intolerable" burdens that few humans would welcome, Jesus alone dares to proclaim the message of the "gift" of the Cross.

Generally speaking, the writers of the Old Testament focus mostly on God's normative gifts (and the correlation between justice and possessions) even though God has given a number of "abnormal gifts" in order to produce perfect servants such as Joseph, Moses, and especially Jonah (the castor-oil plant, for example, is an "abnormal" gift to Jonah). Due to human folly, sheer bad luck, or accidents, these servants learn to accept the rotating gifts of affluence and deprivation before they can reemerge as purified vessels to take God's message to the people. In this context Job also has a good understanding of the perfectly "abnormal" gifts God has in store for his beloved servants. As Job says, "If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too?" (2:10). Job does not blame God, nor does he utter any "sinful word"—though he does stop returning gratitude for his suffering after Satan strikes him the second time.

SATAN: SKIN FOR SKIN

While God is all for the gift paradigm, Satan is a great supporter of the exchange paradigm and a full-fledged believer in the statement, "If

⁵⁵ Dewey, "Qoheleth and Job: Diverse Responses to the Enigma of Evil" 322.

⁵⁶ See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, sel. and intro. Tony Tanner (London: J. M. Dent, 1995) 256. The donation of bone marrow or kidney to a relative falls into this category. While bleeding may not be an obligatory scenario, the gift as a part or an extension of the self, if taken quite loosely, is a universal statement. Hence, the refusal of a gift is often interpreted as the rejection of a person (or that person's intent) and may lead to complications in the interpersonal arena.

friends make gifts, gifts make friends.” In that light, the origin of the great divide lies not in Satan’s hatred of Job’s fidelity, but in Satan’s notion of gift practice. Satan howls: “Skin for skin!” (2:4). His words imply that gift exchange forms an individual and collective “misrecognition”: on the surface it may appear that God gives gifts out of altruistic love and people worship God out of gratitude, but the objective truth is that God longs for recognition, while the worshipper calculates returns or benefits. Satan presumes that he knows the difference between what people say and what they do, that he knows their unspoken assumptions and implicit norms. Thus he declares that “Job is not God-fearing for nothing, is he? Have you not put a wall round him and his house and all his domain? . . . But stretch out your hand and lay a finger on his possessions . . . he will curse you to your face” (1:9–11). Satan’s second conjecture is that “a man will give away all he has to save his life. But . . . lay a finger on his bone and flesh . . . he will curse You to Your face” (2:4–5). The reason why Satan favors the exchange paradigm lies in his belief that people will choose “private property” instead of God. This idea has four implications:

First, even though the whole world is God’s inalienable possession (including the air, one’s health, and wealth), Satan prefers to see the world with an *alienable* mode of distribution and implies that humans can renounce (curse) God and live on their own. *Job’s* possessions, *his* bones and flesh—this is a clever verbal sleight-of-hand that encourages the view that God’s inalienable gifts to humans (signifying an inseparable, dependent relationship) can be turned into an independent, alienable connection.

Second, instead of recognizing God’s spirit in the gift paradigm, Satan legitimizes the fetishistic inversion of prioritizing matter over the “spirit of the gift.” He talks of Job’s bones, flesh, and possessions as if matter has an autonomous mechanism that bears no relevancy to God’s spirit, love, and providence. The fetishistic inversion goes further when Satan equates the spiritual with the material realm, that is, Job’s thankful spirit and his fear of God are linked to the idolatry of matter and the fear of scarcity. Satan presumes that, honest as Job is, he cannot avoid this pitfall. Job “is not God-fearing for nothing” (1:9).

Third, Job’s gifts to God are depreciated to follow a reciprocity model. Job’s previous gifts to God are now read in the light of debt, repayment, and economic mathematics. They mirror the utilitarian circle of reciprocation, so much so that Job gives because of the expectation of return, and he returns out of fear that God may stop giving. We may as well say that Job’s behavior follows the principle of “generalized reciprocity” (according to Sahlins’s definition)—for the mutual demand for obligatory returns is implicit and long-lasting. Instead of disinterest and love, Job’s action involves factors such as self-interest, investment, and calculation. His act of offering a holocaust to God (1:5) is just a counter-gift, a euphe-

mism for the generation of economic capital, while reinforcing the discrepancy in status between humans and God.

Fourth, according to Satan, the interaction between God and humans is that of commodity exchange instead of gift exchange. The difference between the two exchanges lies in the fact that "commodity transactions are . . . determined not by whether money is involved, but by the relative alienation of the transactors from the objects and from each other." The "gift economy" implies that "objects are personified" for the substantiation of a qualitative, interdependent tie. However, in a market economy, commodity exchanges valorize the view that "persons are objectified."⁵⁷ In short, the love between God and Job is, in Satan's mind, reduced to a quantitative relationship where common interests and objects are transacted to enhance its continuity. Each party "objectifies" the other for the sake of marketing his or her status or obtaining marketable benefits.

Unlike God's model of giving (which bestows a variety of gifts), the market model depends on the discourse of scarcity for the enhancement of the exchange paradigm.⁵⁸ Satan loves scarcity because, in tempting situations, people will turn normally inalienable relationships or possessions into alienable entities for sale. The relinquishment of important ties in a market economy not only produces ethical trauma and a cynical reconsideration of what is a fungible and nonfungible item, but also leads people to have a less spiritual outlook and a deeper engagement with cultural fetishism. The memory of "lack" (in times of war, for example) is so firmly ingrained that the gradual restoration of wealth on the individual and social level will not revive a full-fledged sharing culture. The possibility of "future lack" can only strengthen what Žižek calls the "fetishistic disavowal" ("I know money is not everything, but still . . .," "I know God can be trusted, but still . . .").⁵⁹ In the book of Job, following the protocol of the exchange paradigm, Satan suggests that Job is to endure the test of "negative reciprocity." The idea is that Job has paid his obligatory returns, while God must not reciprocate Job's requests and protect his "possessions" and "bone and flesh." The relation-creating aspects of "gift exchange" being now seriously challenged, a person will reveal their ultimate gift ethics, that is, their love of God is based on a sentimental relationism, or it is out of a

⁵⁷ Osteen, "Gift or Commodity" 233. That is why Laidlaw thinks commodity exchange consists of relations between aliens by means of alienable things.

⁵⁸ Genesis dramatizes how the fear of scarcity (lacking knowledge) is first introduced to the human mind, as Satan argues for the exchange of a quality relationship for a valuable entity (the fruit of the tree of good and evil). This act of exchange subsequently leads to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden to reproduce further fetishistic illusion and scarcity in human history.

⁵⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989) 18.

disguised self-interest according to market ideologies (in Parry's words, "nobody does anything for nothing").⁶⁰ As Job rebukes his wife's economic concept of divine worship, he has made his choice as early as chapter 2. In that light, it is an ironic development that Job ends up arguing with his friends about sins and retributive justice, for it befits the human exchange paradigm.

FRIENDS: BALANCED RECIPROCITY AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

The opening of the book of Job gives us a picture of the Israelites' miniature version of potlatch ceremonies: "It was the custom of his sons to hold banquets in each other's houses, one after the other, and to send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them" (1:4). This practice certainly fits into the description of the three interlocking Maussian duties. To be a social member, one has "to give, to receive, and to reciprocate." In this exchange paradigm, human justice always refers to "balanced reciprocity" (*quid pro quo*, an eye for an eye). As Mauss notes, while the potlatch aims at tightening the communal bond, it does not encourage any unconditional generosity—"to refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war."⁶¹ Thus Job's sons wisely take turns holding banquets, proving that Aafke Komter's ideas are right (although gift-givers believe that they are acting altruistically, gift transactions always carry mixed motives, for example, "positive feeling," "insecurity," "prestige," "hostility").⁶² Under such circumstances, repayment or recognition is a form of commerce in which "justice" is administered by an invisible "impartial spectator" we create in our minds using the current cultural norm.⁶³ The ancient morality of the gift or potlatch ceremony delivers the message that to be "just" means to give back what that person is "due"—even though calculation can come in many forms, and there should be an appropriate time gap for making the repayment or the counter-gifts (just to downplay the "business" side of the exchange). Through this notion of

⁶⁰ Parry, "The Gift, the Indian gift, and the 'Indian gift'" 455. Or in Jacques T. Godbout's words, everybody understands the "rule of the implicit" in the gift-giving system: "we declare that there is no expectation of return, while waiting for the gift to be reciprocated." And "if someone offers you something 'for no apparent reason,' a gift that does not enter into a wider gift-giving sequence in which you are a participant, you ask yourself, 'What does this person want from me?'" It suggests that "common sense spontaneously generates the utilitarian hypothesis" (Jacques T. Godbout with Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler [Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University, 1998] 187).

⁶¹ Mauss, *The Gift* (1990) 13.

⁶² Aafke Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (New York: Cambridge University) 46–49.

⁶³ Mauss, *The Gift* (1990) 13.

“balanced reciprocity” we can understand the three friends’ arguments about God’s gifts, that is, the correlation between good fortune and good conduct.

The economy of retribution is in fact akin to reciprocity logic, because the two parties take it for granted that the continuity of gifts is based on repayment, calculation, and constraints. In this cycle of exchange, God is supposed to give humans normative gifts (for example, health, homes, honor) to reward their moral conduct, while humans repay the debt in terms of religious devotion and altruistic deeds. In the early days, God promised the Israelites that, “if you keep my commandments . . . , I will . . . turn toward you, I will make you be fruitful and multiply” (Lev 26:3, 9). According to this moral economy, vengeance and justice signify a balance of accounts. Hence, the deprivation of health and wealth means that the person must be sinful and have failed to keep the commandments.⁶⁴ From God’s distribution of normative gifts to the discourse of sin, the retribution theory offers a neat formula in the exchange paradigm to locate God in the commodity culture, to position humans in a moral-materialistic discourse, and to reduce God-human dynamics to a measurable, predictable, and quantitative relationship. It is easy to see that this theory ignores God’s quintessential gift paradigm, and, in particular, overlooks his many other (free, anomic, abnormal) gifts to humans. To defend the retribution theory’s coherence, its advocates have to distort reality to fit humans into this notion of self-interested reciprocity.

Some critics say that the three friends’ arguments are quite similar, but there are substantial differences. Eliphaz starts his misrepresentation of Job with a mystical vision. Although he has firsthand knowledge of Job’s goodness (Job has given “strength to feeble hands,” and his “words set right whoever wavered” [4:3–4]), he says he heard a “voice” proclaim: “Was ever any man found blameless in the presence of God, or faultless in the presence of his Maker?” (4:17). Thus Eliphaz urges Job to accept the idea that, since all humans are sinners, he should *save his skin by self-incrimination in order to seek rescue*. Thus will Job find his tent “secure” and his “sheepfold untouched” (5:24). Perhaps that is why Job uses mercantile language to accuse Eliphaz of making desperate trade deals to gain protection: “Soon you will be casting lots for an orphan, and selling your friend at bargain prices!” (6:27). In the second speech, Eliphaz reiterates the idea that no man can be clean; his own “experience” tells him that the

⁶⁴ For example, God also says, “If you do not listen to me . . . I will inflict terror on you, consumption and fever that waste the eyes away and exhaust the breath of life” (Lev 26:14, 16 NJB). One can see that Calvinism works along the spirit of retributive justice. No wonder why Weber points out that the market economy, capitalism in particular, is on good terms with Calvinistic doctrines.

wicked man experiences "unceasing torment" (15:20). Eliphaz proceeds to give a colorful description of the wicked person's gradual process of downfall ("distress and anguish close in on him" [15:24]). Job replies that in his case there is no constant decline: "I lived at peace, until [God] shattered me" (16:12). Eliphaz's third speech is devoted to the voicing of "false evidence" (in opposition to his praise of Job's goodness in the first speech). He accuses Job of evil behavior: "You have exacted needless pledges from your brothers, and men go naked now through your despoiling; you have grudged water to the thirsty man, and refused bread to the hungry" (22:6-7). Eliphaz then reinforces his argument on the necessity of Job's self-incrimination, which is fast becoming a logical and rightful thing to do. Job should not apologize to God for the abstract sins that follow from being "born of woman" (15:14). Instead, Eliphaz believes that Job should humble himself for his "manifold wickednesses" (22:4). The way to regain prosperity is simple: "You [Job] will pray, and he will hear. . . . Whatever you undertake will go well" (22:27-28). The difference between Eliphaz and Job is that Job refuses to incriminate himself for a deal, thus he upholds his notion of his innocence and declares, "I have walked in his way without swerving. I have kept every commandment of his lips" (23:12).

Bildad, on the other hand, is fond of making pronouncements. He grounds his first speech in historical assertions. Meditating on "past generations," (8:8) Bildad says "the fathers" will tell Job that those who "forget God" are like flowers that will soon fade away (8:13). Hence Job should adopt the strategic "appeal to mercy" approach to "plead with Shaddai" (8:5). Once again Bildad assures Job, "Your cheeks will fill with laughter, from your lips will break a cry of joy" (8:21). But Job rejects this method to gain his "new prosperity" (8:7). He believes that even though he implores the mercy of his judge, he is not sure God "would listen to [his] voice" (9:15-6). His answer implies that the fathers' beliefs are in fact wrong. God's way is different from humans' symbolic reasoning: God "for no reason, wounds and wounds again" (9:17). The only thing Job is sure of is God's chaotic order: "It is all one, and this I dare to say: innocent and guilty, he destroys all alike" (9:22-23). Bildad's second speech uses moral assertions to argue that wicked people will surely fall. He gives a detailed description of how "the wicked man's light must certainly be put out" (18:5), implying that Job's fall exactly resembles that light imagery. Perhaps that is the reason why Job explodes, "Ten times, no less, you have insulted me, ill-treating me without a trace of shame" (19:3). If Job at first refuses to exploit divine mercy to get a deal, his second answer cynically underscores the fact that humans do not rate "mercy" very highly, unless there is a possibility of gain. Job knows that "my brothers stand aloof from me, and my relations take care to avoid me" (19:13-14). His appeal to human mercy ("Pity me, pity me, you, my friends, for the hand of God has struck

me" [19:21]) is deliberately ignored. Bildad's third speech turns to dichotomizing assertions. He proclaims God's omnipotence and justice while highlighting the sinful condition of humans ("Born of woman, how could he ever be clean?" [25:4]). Job agrees with Bildad that God is just (27:13); however, Job also believes that, though born of a woman, still "I take my stand on my integrity . . . my conscience gives me no cause to blush for my life" (27:6).

Meanwhile, Zophar's argument would not fail to attract those interested in attribution theory. He attributes the causes of Job's fall and suffering to internal factors (Job is evil) and external factors (God "detects the worthlessness in man" [11:10]). He also makes a quick personal attribution about God as a sin-hunter. Zophar tells Job that if "God had a mind to speak . . . you would know it is for sin he calls you to account" (11:5-6). In exchange for peace, Zophar tells Job: "You must set your heart right, stretch out your hands to him," then "no one will dare disturb you" (11:13, 19). Job at once points out Zophar's errors of attribution: God does not always punish people; in fact, even "those who challenge God live in safety" (12:6). Job believes that God's anomic logic does not favor any causal explanation, for God "builds a nation up, then strikes it down, or makes a people grow, then destroys it" (12:23). Zophar's second speech extends his previous argument by attributing the wicked man's fall to comeuppance, perhaps implying that the man might be Job. Job retorts, "I know what is in your mind, the spiteful thoughts you entertain about me" (21:27). He rejects Zophar's depiction, because he sees that God gives gifts indiscriminately and does not always follow the rule of comeuppance, otherwise "why do the wicked still live on, their power increasing with their age?" (21:7). Besides, Job argues, comeuppance—in the form of the wicked man's death or the punishment given to his sons—is not real justice. The good man has no personal property and dies with "bitterness in his heart" (21:25), but the wicked are blessed with fungible property and "they end their lives in happiness and go down in peace to Sheol" (21:13). Job laments that his three friends are "only charlatans" (13:4), that people do not understand God's ways, and that he "shall not find a single sage among [them]" (17:10).

The fact is that, beneath the three friends' vigorous defense of retributive justice, their views represent the functioning of the tit-for-tat framework of the exchange paradigm. As long as one can regain prosperity, it is acceptable to incriminate oneself, appeal to divine mercy, and attribute suffering to God's righteousness. Apropos here are C. A. Gregory's words that the market encourages the "objectification of the person" for economic gain. In addition, to win favor from the donor, it is also acceptable to exchange substantive justice for "imaginary justice." God does not always deal harshly with the wicked; but according to Job's friends, God is eager to

wipe out all evildoers at once. Even though Job protests his innocence before the Law and challenges his friends to "show me the basis for your strictures" (6:25), their belief that Job's fall proves his wickedness reveals that they have indeed made the exchange for imaginary justice. Hence they produce further false, circular accusations to strengthen their case against him: Job has "sent widows away empty-handed, and crushed the arms of orphans" (22:9)—despite Job's testimony that he has never been "insensible to poor men's needs or let a widow's eyes grow dim" (31:16). Thus Job angrily replies, "Will you plead God's defence with prevarication, his case in terms that ring false?" (13:7). Perhaps the biggest problem lies in the fact that, when there is nothing to gain, Job's "friends" are not willing to give the sufferer a helping hand. Instead of providing Job with a shelter or medical relief, they would rather sit on the ground beside him. Job's suffering is aggravated, rather than ameliorated, by the consolations of his three "holy" friends. Hence Job cries: "God has handed me over to the godless, and cast me into the hands of the wicked" (16:11).

In the whirlwind scene, God does not explicitly label the three friends "godless" or "wicked," but neither does he show any bias toward his vigorous defenders. The reason why God punishes the three friends lies in his knowledge of the difference between good faith and bad faith, between what the three friends say and how they act, their unspoken desires and their discursive justice, their explicit impartiality and the implicit economic habitus. Hence Job's prediction in chapter 13, where he challenges his three friends: "Can God be duped as men are duped? Harsh rebuke you would receive from him for your covert partiality" (13:9–10). Elihu alone narrowly escapes punishment, for he is said to be neither a "close friend" of Job, nor a very fervent supporter of the exchange paradigm. Unlike the friends who have traveled a long distance to be near Job (but then offer him no practical help), Elihu is unintentionally present for Job's debate with his friends. In his long speeches, Elihu reproduces most of the friends' flawed arguments about the cause of his fall: Job has sinned, for he calls "justice into question in our midst and [heaps] abuse on God" (34:37). Elihu subscribes to the friends' notion of God's retributive justice and sees that God will punish the wicked with rapid declines (34:17–26; 36:11–12). However, he also acknowledges God's unfathomable ways: "God does not fit man's measure" (33:12). Though Elihu presumes that Job is iniquitous, he also tells him, "For you, no less, [God] plans relief from sorrow" (36:16). As Elihu suggests to Job no course of action to regain prosperity, clearly Elihu does not favor the discourse of calculation in the religious economy. Furthermore, he does not trust the notion of balanced reciprocity (the view that sins create debt so God has to balance the account and repay human-kind with punishment). Thus he states: "If you heap up crimes, what is the injury you do Him? If you are just, what do you give Him?" (35:6–7). He

implies that God punishes people and defends justice because of his impartiality. For Elihu, God's justice is unlike human justice: "Whether for punishing earth's people or for a work of mercy, he dispatches them" (37:13). Thus the three friends—while giving flattering speeches about God—have failed.

JOB: THE CONFLICTING GIFT NARRATIVES AND THE LOVE CULTURE

In the end, Job turns out to be the one who fulfils the fourth obligation—to make gifts to God—because he loves God. In fact, he loves God so much that he volunteers to offer holocausts for his sons' "imaginary offense" (1:5). One cannot say that he does this solely out of a sense of "fear" or "justice"; since he does not actually know what sins his sons have committed, he cannot repay God in condign terms. Moreover, one cannot say that Job presents his burnt offerings for the sake of playing it safe according to the exchange paradigm—for he does not offer them to protect himself or his sons (thereby prioritizing human interests). On the contrary, he acts out of a fervent regard for his beloved, thinking only of God's happiness. As he offers a gift to God, he is thinking, "perhaps . . . my sons have sinned and in their hearts affronted God" (1:5). Job is like the lover who hastily presents a bouquet to his beloved for fear that she might feel upset because of his boorish relatives. Hence his goal is to enhance God's contentment, prioritizing God's joy. Satan argues that it is God's abundant gifts that make Job love God. However, we must recall that, even though the discourse of love includes gifts and material goods, they cannot buy true love, which endures beyond the thrill of the diamond and when gifts are scarce. The difference between Job's and his wife's reactions to God tells us that "true love" is a blessing in itself. Love motivates lovers to present gifts to each other; however, the realm of matter—the gift or its absence—does not enter the equation of true love.⁶⁵ Job's heart remains unchanged even though God has failed to bestow gifts on him.

If the absence of gifts does not terminate a love relationship, Job's subsequent lamentations can only mirror the conflicting gift narratives of love culture. Even though true love is based on spontaneous gift-giving and does not depend on the reciprocity of gifts, the lover will *complain* if he knows that his beloved has accepted many gifts from him, and suddenly she undergoes a change of attitude, stops responding to his love, and actually distributes many gifts to others and none to him. Job is likely to complain

⁶⁵ In this context we can understand Lee Anne Fennell's words: "on the surface, people exchange objects, but the real exchange is taking place in the realm of the emotions" ("Unpacking the Gift: Illiquid Goods and Empathetic Dialogue," in *The Question of the Gift* 89).

all the more, because his body feels a lot of pain, and his mind is confused by the words of the three friends who tell him that God, his beloved, has abandoned him because of his fault. Under these circumstances, Job's responses develop in four phases. First, like a truly faithful lover, Job dwells on his present desolation and would rather die than give up God. Hence, instead of denouncing God, he "cursed the day of his birth" (3:1; see 3:3-26, 10:18). Job believes that he would gladly let God's will be done and he would still not deny God. Thus he says, "May it please God to crush me," even though he knew that he "had not denied the Holy One's decrees" (6:9-10).

Job's second response, however, is much less positive. Like a suspicious lover whose love becomes suddenly unrequited, he complains bitterly that his beloved is now becoming insensitive and hostile. He now sees God in an ambivalent light. God loves him and does not love him. "What is man," Job asks rhetorically, ". . . that morning after morning you should examine him and at every instant test him?" (7:18). Job thinks he is sure of his beloved's good will to him in the first place: "Did you not pour me out like milk, and curdle me then like cheese; clothe me with skin and flesh?" (10:10-11). However, like a desperate lover who suffers from a change of his beloved's attitude, Job professes his unchanging devotion while accusing the other of instability: "I shall speak, not fearing him. . . . I shall say to God, 'Do not condemn me, but tell me the reason for your assault'" (9:35-10:2). He asks despairingly why his beloved must reject him: "Suppose I have sinned, what have I done to you? Can you not tolerate my sin, nor overlook my fault?" (7:20-21). As his sufferings and his queries fill him with "bitterness" (9:18), he thinks God is a dissembler who only pretended to have loved him: God is merely "dissembling; biding your time . . . to mark if I should sin and let no fault of mine go uncensured . . . so wholly abject . . . am I" (10:13-15).

Third, Job becomes "rebellious" and argues that his beloved is now a "cruel" persecutor (30:21). Though God has "wisdom and power" and "strength" and "resourcefulness" (12:16) yet his behavior is unpredictable and can "play havoc with" people's lives and affections (12:13, 15). Therefore, Job says, he must "argue with God" (13:3); he has no other hope than to justify his conduct in God's eyes. He recalls that his happiness and sadness both depend on God; however, God can cruelly turn his eyes away and "leave him alone, like a hired drudge, to finish his day" (14:6). Like many unhappy lovers who fantasize that death will make the heart grow fonder and revive some tenderness in their beloved, Job implores God: "If only you would hide me in Sheol . . . until your anger is past. . . . Then you would call, and I should answer" (14:13-15). As God will "want to see the work of [his] hands once more" (14:15), Job imagines that God "will look

for me, but I will be no more" (7:21). In a Wertherian way, Job faces a negative situation with self-negating groans and lamentations. He now believes that God can only be cruel to him. Hence he regrets his previous strategy and laments: "my heart within me sinks" (19:27). God will "crush him once for all" (14:19). In chapter 16, Job reiterates his beloved's cruel abandonment of him. His sufferings and his people's ill-treatment of him fill him with self-pity (17:1-10, 19:13-22). He is angry at his beloved, who is being "unfair" and "unjust" to him. While his "flesh begins to rot" (19:20) and "the wicked still live on" (21:7, 10), Job's attention is solely focused on this doom: "You [God] have grown cruel in your dealings with me" (30:21).

Job's final position is like that of an angry, obsessive lover who, hope against hope, stands his ground, keeps pestering his beloved, and demands a fair hearing. Even though feelings of despair rise within him (chapter 24 is full of images of emotional deprivation, abandonment, and death), his obsession compels him to confess, "My tears flow before Him" (16:20). Like a persistent lover, Job cares less about counter-gifts and becomes more and more obsessed with his right to have a conversation with his beloved, believing that negotiation can clarify all previous misunderstandings and restore a relationship: "If only I knew how to reach him, or how to travel to his dwelling! I should set out my case to him. . . . He would have to give me a hearing" (23:3-4, 6). Job is confident of the strength of his love, and he also knows that he has tried everything to please his beloved. In chapters 31 and 32 Job presents a long litany of his efforts at fidelity. He lacks only a hearing from God.

Perhaps the Joban adventure tells us that, as difficult as it is for humans to hand out free gifts (with no recognition, self-recognition, no gratitude), it is just as difficult to practice "free" love. Love culture does not rely on reciprocity or work on the basis of calculating exchange, hence Job cannot help loving God even though he feels abandoned, and he has not been receiving gifts from God for some time. However, the lack of any counter-gift or return of affection can only lead the subject to unhappiness and angry complaints. The harder the lover tries to please the beloved, the louder the queries or complaints will be. In short, what begins with freedom and emotional spontaneity will quickly lead to anticipated reciprocity. Sooner or later the word "justice" will come up, especially if the subject, after doing great service for the other, feels that he has not received his "due" reward. In that light, Job ends up being a very "gifted" speaker in the libidinal model, for he says to his friends, "Silence! Now I will do the talking, whatever may befall me" (13:13). Between discourse and death, Job's verbal compulsion signifies what Hyde calls an "emanation of eros" in the form of powerful grievances. His unorthodox words are probably not

for the staging of any polyphonic resistance in order to blaspheme God because of his sufferings,⁶⁶ but for the sake of his heartache. Job is forlorn, as he feels he has been forsaken by God. Job has not turned rebellious because of his material loss (for example, health and wealth). In fact, he meekly accepts his suffering and merely curses his life. He has no intention to recount his sorrows—as early as chapter 6, he tells his friend, “Put me right, and I will say no more” (6:24). It is his friends’ notion of “justice” that provokes his debate on God’s erratic ways. Job’s main concern is with how the relationship breaks down. In his long litany (31:5–40), Job invokes many hypothetical situations (“if”) to highlight not only his innocence, but also his faithful effort to maintain a relationship. However, his sorrow mirrors the fact that effort alone has failed to guarantee success. For reasons unknown (humans “know [God] . . . only by hearsay” 42:5), God refuses to answer Job’s queries, and takes no notice when Job stands before him (30:20). Perhaps Job’s subsequent outbursts can be read as a desperate response that articulates his entrapment: while his friends’ utilitarian logic of love disgusts him, the emotive contour of relationships can only reduce Job to overwhelming anguish.

The final scene is vital, for it reinstates God’s gift paradigm. Its purpose is not, as some critics say, to restore the just person after a cold-hearted eradication of all his property (in other words, an immoral compensation). Nor is its purpose to encourage hearers to remain faithful to God in hopes of eventual gains (that is, a return to the “moral economy”). What stands out in the last scene is the triumph of God’s all-“for-giving model.” In the end, God and all four men have to give gifts either to God or to one another. God forgives the three men and Job for their misconceptions of his ways. The three men have to offer gifts to God to seek forgiveness. Job has to forgive his three friends and actually offer gifts to God for them (the gift of prayer). God explains his position to Job and gives him gifts to reassure Job of his love in the midst of hardship and prosperity. All in all, “*com-muni-cation—giving gifts together*”⁶⁷ becomes the final motif of the book of Job. God intends that humans should forgive each other and give gifts to love and support one another. In the final analysis, God becomes reconciled with humans as humans attain reconciliation with God, with their neighbor, and themselves through gift-loving and gift-sharing (hence no more cursing of life). In the end, the restoration of love and of strong social bonds is evident in the breaking down of emotional and gender

⁶⁶ See Newsom, *Book of Job* 21–31.

⁶⁷ See Genevieve Vaughan, “Gift Giving as the Female Principle vs. Patriarchal Capitalism” (2004), <http://www.gift-economy.com/articlesAndEssays/principleVsPatriarchal.html> (accessed August 15, 2005).

barriers. As Job's "brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house," Job had generously forgotten all the past injuries and wisely accepted—instead of spurned—the gifts of many rings of "gold" offered by them (42:11). Being once oppressed by poverty, Job sympathized with the oppressed and gave inheritance rights to his three daughters (42:15). As the life-supporting gift cycle goes on, Job's life was a gifted one and he died at a fulsome 140 years of age.