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[Introduction to] Alcyone: Nietzsche on Gifts, Noise, and Women

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Alcyone

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Prelude: Nietzsche and Archaic Economies

Taking my cue from Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, I might describe this attempt at reading Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and some of its associated texts as a palinode. After showing that he can compose a better speech of seduction in behalf of the nonlover than Lysias can, Socrates recants and delivers his palinode, a magnificent speech in behalf of the lover that contains the great myth of the soul's sprouting of wings. It will be seen that my palinode (really an attempt to *hear* some of Nietzsche's songs) also invokes a certain flutter of wings as well as some other figures of the Nietzschean animal world. In an earlier study, *Nietzschean Narratives*, I tried to show that Nietzsche the storyteller had been neglected in favor of Nietzsche the aphorist and fragmentary thinker. It was incumbent upon me, then, to show that at least some of Nietzsche's texts could be read either as structured narratives or as engaging at a deep level with the nature of narrative discourse. While not retracting all of those readings, I believe that there are other keys and tones in Nietzsche's musical repertoire worth listening to. Nietzsche, especially in his last writings, always is asking his readers to hear him aright, with the proper ear, and with a sense for his tone; and as with any piece of complex and difficult music what one hears develops and changes with repeated listenings. And whatever excessive degree of bravura might be found in Nietzsche's claim to be the master of more styles than any other writer, his compositions surely cannot be reduced to program music. What follows, then, is at least a song sung in another tone than the earlier one. Nietzsche, of course, was no stranger to such musical battles, as he demonstrates toward

the end of *Zarathustra,* whose orchestration is discussed in "Parasites and Their Noise." At the same time it should be obvious that every reading of Nietzsche is a performance as well as an act of observation. If Nietzsche's books are gifts they do not determine once and for all what their recipients will do with them.

The topics announced here—gifts, noise, and women—are hardly central to the philosophical canon as usually conceived, and so it should be evident that I have little interest in reclaiming Nietzsche for such a canon. However, it is worth recalling at a time when canons and the canonization of texts, syllabi and curricula of all sorts are in question, that one of the prominent senses of *canon* is that of a musical order or discipline. I mean to ask in part just how we might hear Nietzsche but also how listening to him might sensitize our ears to other tunes and even to the noise or static against which philosophers take such great precautions and which sometimes is given the ambivalent name of empiricism. Gifts, noise, women: of these only one, women, is likely to be recognized as having been addressed by a number of major thinkers and most will take that to be at best an unfortunate lapse and at worst a reason for rejecting the thinkers and their work wholesale. Nietzsche, because he is so often taken to be a philosopher of culture, risks being tested by his supposedly misogynistic "views" on this subject to an extraordinary degree. I want to suggest that, beyond any such views, maxims, declarations, or anecdotes, we would do well to hear a certain tone, the one that Nietzsche calls *halcyon,* that resounds here and there throughout his texts.

The topics (*topoi* or places) that I have attempted to articulate here perhaps could be given a sort of perverse legitimation by seeing them as the antitheses or anticoncepts of certain notions that have a more obvious philosophical currency. Consider the gift, which seems to be a deviant form or special case of the notion of property. Any social or political philosophy must deal with the question of property. There is a casuistry of property that considers whether ownership ought to be based on inheritance or labor; what limits should there be on one's use of one's private property; and what rights may the state have to tax and regulate property. At a more general level the question aris-

es of whether property ought to be vested in the individual or the state. What are gifts in such a perspective? They are gratuitous, anomalous, and superfluous; that these very terms should have become so close in their meanings indicates the double need both to marginalize these unusual economic activities and to recognize them in their peripheral and exceptional status. Anthropologists like Marcel Mauss have suggested that in what we call archaic economies the gift is primary and what we call property (whether belonging to the individual or the state) is a category not easy to recognize. The archaic is both the ancient and primitive as well as the principle or primary thing; following this suggestion we might ask whether modern exchange and ownership are secondary and derivative practices. If the gift is the uncanny *other* of property, we may well ask whether these thoughts and social practices have deeper metaphysical roots and affiliations. For something to be my property is for me to own it, that is, for it to be a part of my extended self or larger identity. Hegel is quite clear on this:

> By the judgment of possession, at first in the outward appropriation, the thing acquires the predicate of "mine." But this predicate, on its own account merely "practical" has here the signification that I import my personal will into the thing. As so characterized, possession is *property*, which as possession is a *means*, but as existence of the personality is an *end*. In his property the person is brought into union with himself.[1]

Writing at what he takes to be the end of metaphysics, Hegel makes explicit the connection in Western thought between personality and property. Of course this is not the end of Hegel's account, for he immediately adds that property implies recognition by others and so refers us to a community, each member of which is an actual or potential owner of property. The thought can be developed in various ways. Max Stirner, in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Individual and His Own*) took it in an anarchist direction, whereas Karl Marx attempted to rethink property in terms of human species being. Anthropologists who have written about the gift relationship in archa-

ic societies have agreed with Hegel and company about the close reciprocity between private property and personality, but they have tended to see the connection as one that holds only within certain cultural boundaries. What is difficult for *us* to see, they say, are cultures in which, because of the circulation of the gift, there is neither property nor personality in our sense. The very cultures that Hegel held to be prehistorical (treating as he did, Africans and other "native" peoples in the geographical prelude to his *Philosophy of History*) and that Marx took to exemplify "primitive communism" (ambiguously designating either the primary or the undeveloped), the anthropologists remind us, are much more typical of the human than is the West, simply because there are so many more of the former. And as they go on to point out, if the connection between property and personality is a culturally limited fact, then economies of the gift may carry with them different conceptions of human beings in the place that *we* allot to subjectivity, individuality, and personality.

My strategy in *Alcyone* is to suggest that Nietzsche, whose mind was always on the archaic (most obviously on the Greece of the *archê*), came to some insights concerning the gift that bear remarkable parallels to those of the anthropologists. This should not be a complete surprise because Nietzsche and the anthropologists, as Jacques Derrida reminds us, launched almost simultaneous projects aimed at showing that the most fundamental Western concepts and values were the peculiar habits of a particular *ethnos*.[2] In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes philosophizing as "a kind of atavism of the highest order" because it consists in tracing out the affiliations of concepts that have grown up in the same cultural milieu. The principles of such affiliation are what Nietzsche calls grammar, and as an "old philologist" he knows above all that languages are different and cannot be taken as copies at various removes of some fundamental *Ursprache* (in the way that, for example, an earlier philosophical philology had taken Hebrew to be the source of all languages):

> The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where

> there is affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretation. It is highly probable that philosophers within the domain of the Ural-Altaic languages (where the concept of the subject is least developed) look otherwise "into the world," and will be found on paths of thought different from those of the Indo-Germanic peoples and the Muslims: the spell of certain grammatical functions is ultimately also the spell of *physiological* valuations and racial conditions. (*BGE*, 20; 5, 34–35)

Yet what is *in* any language, or as some would ask, what is *given* in it? Nietzsche's emphasis on "grammar" in the passage quoted suggests the synchronic approach to language of structural linguistics. Now to be concerned with the archaic is to look not only at the distant other but at possibilities implicit within a certain language or cultural formation that may now be obscured or disguised. This is to indicate the direction of Heidegger's interrogations of the languages of thinking and poetry, and most notably for my purposes, of his attempt to make the simple *"es gibt"* (or in its anglophone philosophical analogue, "the given") resound in a certain way. Heidegger appears to be more interested in archaic origins than in archaic structures. Like Nietzsche, and perhaps more under his spell in this respect than he is able to acknowledge, Heidegger hears these resonances in the archaic Greek of pre-Platonic thought. He hopes that we can rediscover the strange in the familiar and so asks us to hear some of the oldest sayings of the West in ways that they have not been heard by the scholars or by the philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Nietzsche. In listening to the fragment of Anaximander, allegedly the earliest trace of our inheritance from these archaic thinkers, Heidegger takes pains to reread the clause that can be read as speaking not of giving as such but of exchange, as in young Nietzsche's translation: "Whence things have their ori-

gin, there they must also pass away according to necessity; for they must pay penalty (*Büsse zahlen*) and be judged for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time."[3] From this saying Heidegger excludes the apparent reference to an economy of exchange and instead substitutes a discourse of usage, jointure, and reck (*Brauch, Fug,* and *Ruch*), that would refer us to a giving beyond all economies. Part of this gesture of translation no doubt consists in turning away from those conventional histories of early Greek philosophy that would remind us of the intimate connection in which the Milesian thinkers Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes stood to the active and cosmopolitan commercial life of their time. There perhaps is a desire here to preserve the authenticity and distance of such thinking from a vulgarized culture of the market. But might Heidegger have concluded too hastily that all economies, whether in the common or the metaphysical sense, must be founded on the alienation of goods and the conventions of private property? If that is so, it might help to account for the common feeling that there is something vague and empty in Heidegger's talk of *es gibt.* This giving in which there is no subject, no circulation, and no articulation of a structure in which gifts might be exchanged, comes to appear as a determined flight from the modern market.[4] If Heidegger sometimes opposes to the world of commodified exchange a certain appeal to preindustrial conditions of peasant agriculture and handicraft, we could ask why his range of cultural options is so narrow, and why the peasant life on the land that he evokes is still implicitly committed to an economy of private ownership.

Not only in his early lectures on the Greek thinkers but also in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche too alludes to Anaximander's saying, although in the latter case the author's name is not mentioned because the saying is meant to stand for an entire philosophical tradition from the early Greeks down to Schopenhauer. Significantly this reprise of the saying occurs at a point where Zarathustra is discussing the general law of compensation (in a spirit that is not foreign to Emerson's consideration of the same topic); and it is recalled at a time when Zarathustra's hesitations in speaking and articulating his own teaching or gift become obvious. In "Of Redemption" (*Von der*

Erlösung), *redemption* carries with it both its economic and its religious senses, senses that (as Nietzsche will argue in *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*) ought to be seen in their complicity. Should cripples be redeemed? Do their deformities and suffering warrant their receiving compensation and being made right or whole? To answer such questions in the affirmative is to subscribe to the thirst for revenge against "time and its 'it was'" that infects many more than just those who happen to be physically crippled. The principle of such revenge is now attributed to madness, and to a madness that came into being as part of a global climatic shift in Western thinking:

> And then cloud upon cloud rolled over the spirit: until at last madness preached: "Everything passes away, therefore everything deserves to pass away!
>
> "And that law of time, that time must devour her children, is justice (*Gerechtigkeit*)": thus madness preached.
>
> "Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment (*Sittlich sind die Dinge geordnet nach Recht und Strafe*). Oh, where is redemption (*Erlösung*) from the stream of things and from the punishment 'existence'? Thus madness preached. (*Z*, 162; *4*, 180)

Heidegger wanted to preserve a certain insight into primordial giving by attributing a large part of the traditional Anaximander saying to later accretions that already derived from Platonic and Aristotelian thought, providing him with a radical vantage point from which to assess Western metaphysics. Nietzsche, however, offers an even more sweeping and radical critique of that tradition to the extent that even Anaximander can be seen as preaching its madness. If there are other voices, voices that do not preach, but resonate in other keys and with other words, they too might be found at archaic levels, such as those that Heidegger explores, but they may be voices quite distinct from the Anaximander painfully reconstructed and deconstructed by Heidegger.

In the chapter on gifts I attempt to explore some of the sounds and voices that resonate through Nietzsche's texts when we attempt to read them with the metaphysical tradition

in question. All these voices could be said to be archaic inspirations, but to speak of the archaic is simultaneously to suggest that Nietzsche can be read in the light of rather contemporary concerns and speculations having to do with economies, the parasitic relation, and the question of gender. It would be unfortunate, however, if Nietzsche were construed as on a nostalgic quest for a return to lost origins; rather the archaic appears in his work as a suggestion of possibilities excluded by what we have come to call the metaphysics of presence.

If the gift can be said to be the counterconcept that puts into question not the legitimacy of property but the implicit universality of the concept of property, similar observations can be made about noise in relation to language and music and about women in relation to a putatively universal concept of man or humanity. Noise is by definition, it seems, arbitrary sound, especially the sounds made by unwanted intruders or thoughtless neighbors, animal or human. As such it is opposed to both discursive language and music, each of which has its own form of order, syntactic or melodic. The traditional hierarchy clearly is at work in Plato's *Republic* when Socrates pronounces a series of exclusions on various forms of *mimesis.* The series goes from bad to worse: first one must not imitate those of high station and repute performing ignoble actions; then they must not imitate women, especially those wailing in the grip of misfortune or those who are ill, in labor, or in love; finally Socrates summons up with horror the sounds of the universal pantomime who would imitate "'horses neighing, bulls lowing, the roaring of rivers,the crashing of the sea, thunder, and everything of the sort—will they imitate them?' 'But' he said 'They're forbidden to be mad or to liken themselves to the mad.'"[5] The canon of performance in poetry and music (the Greek *mousiké*) excludes not only inferior poetic and musical modes but the inhuman and the subhuman. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche already questioned the logocentrism that would always make words prior to melody, and so allied himself with Wagner in an attack on the opera in so far as it remained discursive. But other sounds are evoked in *The Birth of Tragedy,* perhaps the echoes of those excluded cries of women, sounds associated with illness, labor, and love. These

are the sounds that burst into the rigorous world subject to Apollinian canons:

> And now let us imagine how into this world, built on mere appearance and moderation and artificially damned up, there penetrated in tones even more bewitching and alluring, the ecstatic sound of the Dionysian festival; how in these strains all of nature's *excess* in pleasure, grief, and knowledge became audible, even in piercing shrieks; and let us ask ourselves what the psalmodizing artist of Apollo, with his phantom harp-sound, could mean in the face of this demonic folk-song! (*BT*, 4; *1*, 40–41)

These sounds are neither speech nor music, but are, as Nietzsche frequently repeats, *ecstatic* and *excessive*. They are superfluous by any measure, yet here a certain conception of truth is noisily overthrown, for as Nietzsche continues, summarizing what he has just said "*Excess* revealed itself as truth." The excessive, the superfluous and the parasitic are affiliated notions in Nietzsche and as we will see, they are all orchestrated or auditory concepts. Yet these auditory excesses have a difficult and complex relation to economic orders. Such unanticipated disruptions (as in the preceding passage) may be described as a gift or a given in a way that Heidegger might endorse. But they also are interruptions and interjections that summon up apparently pejorative terms such as *parasitic*. It's perhaps a question of who's invited to the feast (here the *Dionysusfeier*); elsewhere in *The Birth of Tragedy* the words of modern (pre-Wagnerian) opera are said to be "parasitic" upon the music (*BT* 19, *1*, 126), but Nietzsche in that context is very far from saying of those words that "excess revealed itself as truth." In the next chapter of this book, I examine the general economy of parasitism that structures the fourth part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This text, itself often dismissed as merely supplementary or parasitic, brings together the themes of noise, interruption, and the seemingly inevitable degeneration of the gift relationship into that of host and parasite. Reading this part of Nietzsche's gift, I suggest, is rather like performing a score and the performance may affect the way we hear such "doctrines" as the thought of eternal recurrence.

Finally it is necessary to ask how we ought to take Nietzsche's own program notes for *Zarathustra,* and especially his claim that we fail entirely to hear the work properly if we do not catch its "halcyon tone." This tone, I suggest, is to be understood in terms of the halcyon theme that runs through Greek and Latin literature. Whereas Nietzsche's invocations of Dionysus and Ariadne can be regarded as the deliberate use of the classical mythological repertory, his summoning up of Alcyone's fate and her songs seems to be more of an inspiration from the classical unconscious. (I say *seems* here because of the many obvious but difficult questions raised by any discussion of conscious and unconscious composition in Nietzsche's work.) Alcyone's voice is gendered, and the reproduction of her cries would seem to violate Socrates' proscription of the *mimesis* of women who are "ill, in labor, or in love." So if her song does resonate through at least some of Nietzsche's writings, it will be necessary to reconsider the question of the metaphysical affiliations of those texts once they are heard with the accents of love, sorrow, and childbirth. It now appears that the universal man or humanity of the metaphysical tradition is in fact a gendered being. We can read the admission of women into the guardian class of the *Republic* as well as their exclusions as permissible subjects of *mimesis* as strategies for providing *man* and *humanity* with a gender to which women will be admitted only by surrendering their own voices. Nietzsche's objections to this duplicitous universalism are well known, but we only recently have begun to discover that his writings can be read or played in such a way as to hear some of those tones as he transgresses so many mimetic canons.

Notes

1. Hegel, *Encylopedia,* pars. 489 and 490; trans. William Wallace, in *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (New York, 1971), p. 244.

2. Jacques Derrida remarks on this coincidence in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences": "one can assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the

moment when European culture—and in consequence, the history of metaphysics and its concepts—had been *dislocated,* driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference...there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism—the very condition for ethnology—should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 282.

3. On Heidegger's evasion of the question of modern work, production and ownership, see Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics,* ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, 1989), especially pp. 75–89.

4. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* as translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank Capuzzi in Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment" in *Early Greek Thinking* (New York, 1975), p. 13.

5. Plato, *Republic,* 395e–396b. I present only a brief and conventional .account of Plato's restrictions on *mimesis* here to suggest some of the ways in which Nietzsche's writing deviates from one significant set of philosophical canons; in other words I am, for the moment, more interested in how Plato has been read than in attempting a post-Nietzschean reading. For some suggestions concerning the parameters of such a reading, one might begin with Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography.* Plato himself was not above engaging in lamentation for a lost love, as his epitaph for Dion shows. The epitaph and Plato's apparent recantation of some of the strictures of the *Republic* are cited and discussed in Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York, 1986), pp. 200–233.