This book is a history of European interpretations of the gift from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Reciprocal gift exchange, pervasive in traditional European society, disappeared from the discourse of nineteenth-century social theory only to return as a major theme in twentieth-century anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, and literary studies. Modern anthropologists encountered gift exchange in Oceania and the Pacific Northwest and returned the idea to European social thought; Marcel Mauss synthesized their insights with his own readings from remote times and places in his famous 1925 essay on the gift, the starting point for subsequent discussion. The Return of the Gift demonstrates how European intellectual history can gain fresh significance from global contexts.

The Return of the Gift

EUROPEAN HISTORY
OF A GLOBAL IDEA

Harry Liebersohn
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
To Carl Schorske
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments • page ix

Introduction • 1

1. The Crisis of the Gift: Warren Hastings and His Critics • 9
   Hastings and the Gift on Trial • 10
   Edmund Burke on Hastings's Corruption of the Gift • 16
   James Mill's Emancipation from the Gift • 19
   Ghulam Hussain on Britain's Refusal of the Gift • 23

2. Liberalism, Self-Interest, and the Gift • 27
   Hobbes and the Voluntary Gift • 29
   Mandeville's Rejection of the Gift • 31
   Adam Smith on Modern Liberality • 35
   Friedrich List, German Economics, and the Turn to History • 40
   Karl Bücher and the Making of Economic Anthropology • 44
   Bücher and the Return of the Gift • 53

3. The Selfless “Savage”: Theories of Primitive Communism • 61
   Adam Ferguson and the Rude Republic of Virtue • 63
   Lewis Henry Morgan on Kinship and Community • 65
   Engels and Marx on Primitive Communism • 86

4. Anthropologists and the Power of the Gift: Boas, Thurnwald, Malinowski • 95
   Franz Boas and the Kwakiatl Potlatch • 97
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first draft of this book was written during my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin) in 2006–2007. I am grateful to Dieter Grimm, director during the fall semester, and Luca Giuliani, director during the spring, for their hospitality. I continued my research and writing during a stay at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, in June 2008 and wish to thank Lorraine Daston, director of Section II, for her invitation to join the Institute during this time. Antoinette Burton as chair of the History Department at the University of Illinois approved an academic leave from teaching for the fall of 2009, permitting me to complete the book.

Audiences offered valuable criticisms of my ideas on gift exchange at the Philadelphia 2006 meeting of the American Historical Association; the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin; the Forschungskolloquium Neuere und Neueste Geschichte (Research Colloquium for Modern and Contemporary History), University of Konstanz; the Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas (Berlin Seminar for Comparative European History), Free University of Berlin; the Institut für Religionswissenschaft (Institute for the Scientific Study of Religion), Free University of
Acknowledgments

Berlin; the Canadian Center for German and European Studies, University of Montreal; The Gift in History: Symposium in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis's Eightieth Birthday, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; and the St. Louis 2009 meeting of the Society for French History Studies.

Friends and colleagues have deepened my understanding of gift exchange and its milieux from Polynesia to Paris. I especially wish to thank Jeffrey Bowman, Mario Bührmann, Alice Conklin, Natalie Z. Davis, Peter Fritzsche, John Gascoigne, Thomas Head, Jürgen Osterhammel, and Vanessa Smith for conversations, comments, and all that I have learned from their writings; in addition, I thank Vanessa Agnew, Philippe Despoix, Catarina Krizancic, and Mark Micale for commenting on individual chapters of this book. Two anonymous referees provided detailed, constructive criticisms of the manuscript that greatly aided my revisions.

My research was aided by archivists and librarians at many institutions. I particularly wish to thank Mary Stuart of the University of Illinois Library for her stewardship of the University of Illinois history collections and Anja Sommer, archivist of the Berlin Ethnological Museum, for guiding me through the museum's archival holdings. The staff of the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) did everything possible to make my visit to use Marcel Mauss's papers comfortable and fruitful. I am also indebted to librarians and archivists who made original source materials available to me at the University Library, Leipzig, Special Collections; and the University of Rochester Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.

My family – Dorothee, Ben, and Jack – brought zest to conversations about the gift as I researched and wrote; Dorothee helped at
a critical late moment with finding the right title and pulling the book into a unified whole.

Eric Crahan has been an ideal editor at Cambridge University Press, judicious and helpful at every stage; it has been a pleasure to work with him and his colleagues.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the University of Rochester Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, for permission to quote from a letter from Ely S. Parker to Lewis H. Morgan, of which they are owner; and to Robert Mauss and to the Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine for permission to cite from the personal papers of Marcel Mauss.