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The Gift

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Recent Extensions of the Gift

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, Alain Caillé reconstructs the “singular history of the MAUSS (Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences)” from when in early 1980 a group of friends from different disciplines (sociologists, economists, philosophers, etc.) decided to found the “Bulletin du MAUSS” to counter the growing hegemony of utilitarianism and economism in the human sciences and in the philosophical disciplines themselves. The Bulletin would initially become the “Revue du MAUSS trimestrielle” from 1988 to 1992 and from 1993 to 2022 the “Revue du MAUSS semestrielle” until its current anglophone extension “MAUSS International”. The author takes Marcel Mauss’ definition of the gift as a “total social fact” and explains that the gift paradigm is a “translation operator” in the sense that it is continuously enriched in interaction with existing discourses. The theoretical operation that Caillé proposes is to explicate Mauss’s discovery by moving from a simple gift paradigm, based on the perspective of simple reciprocity between giver and recipient, to an expanded gift paradigm. In this way, it can dialogue with other paradigms and other currents of thought (theory of recognition, theory of care, theory of human development, etc.). And from here to a conception of the gift as “adonnement”, i.e. the commitment of human subjects to bring something new and unprecedented into the world.

Keywords: axiomatic of interest; extended gift paradigm; MAUSS’S epistemological revolution; simple gift paradigm.

I am a well-bred boy. I was taught not that “the self is hateful”, as Pascal wrote, but that it should not be put forward, and that it is better to listen to others than to talk about oneself. My editor, however, encourages me to talk about myself with this book. I have already published many books, indeed, about thirty, some of which are about giving as well. “What is new

about this one? Why is it particularly important to you”, she asks? The question is legitimate and forces me to come out of my reserve. After all, I am now of a certain age, not to say a definite age, which authorizes me, in the hope of making the reader understand better what is at stake in this work, to briefly retrace the intellectual path I have followed for some fifty years. In retrospect, it seems to me that everything I have tried to think about for half a century (yes, time does fly) stems from my astonishment at the amazing contrast between the two disciplines in which I was trained and which gave me a doctorate, economics on the one hand, and sociology on the other. The certainty that animates the first of these two disciplines, at least for the majority of its representatives, is that human subjects are or must be considered as (more or less) rational calculators whose only aim is to maximize their individual interest. Sociology has a much more complex representation of humans. Too much so, perhaps. The sociology I favor, that of the classics, is multidisciplinary. When I was 23, I had the good fortune to be appointed as a sociology assistant at the University of Caen with Claude Lefort, the intellectual heir of the famous philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and himself considered one of the main theorists of democracy and totalitarianism. The sociology we taught at the time was in dialogue with all the disciplines of the human and social sciences, anthropology, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis and political economy. At the crossroads of all these disciplines, one text shone out: Marcel Mauss’ *Essay on the Gift*. Fascinating, disconcerting since the gift that he showed his readers with the help of a gigantic wealth of ethnographic materials, the gift that structured archaic societies, hardly resembles what the word gift most often and spontaneously evokes today: a radically disinterested gesture, close to charity or sacrifice. Under his pen, it appears on the contrary as a “hybrid” act, charged with ambivalence, disinterested, yes in a sense, but just as much interested, both free and obliged. In any case, it is far from the figure of *homo œconomicus* that economists hold dear. By generalizing his discovery, I gradually came to the conviction that the gift relation, as analyzed by Mauss, is the general form of relationship between human subjects insofar as they intend to consider themselves as persons recognized as such and valued in their singularity. It is an operator of recognition and singularization: I give you this, and not something else, because you are you and not someone else. This is enough to outline a vision of human subjects that is infinitely richer and more powerful, more general in any case, than that which inspires the dominant economic science. If we consider that standard economic science is the crystallization of a utilitarian vision of the world – a vision, to put it briefly, that reduces all questions to a single one: “Of what use is it (for me)?” – then it is easy to see how this

conception of the gift is at the heart of an anti-utilitarian approach to the human and social sciences. “Anti-utilitarianism” is the banner under which, with my friends of the MAUSS (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Science Sociale), I have led and still lead all my scientific, but also ethical and political, struggles. These, during two or three decades, were seen with a strange eye by my colleagues in various disciplines, most often skeptical and suspicious but for occasional and punctual sympathies. Gradually things have changed. An international Colloquium organized five years ago at the Château de Cerisy la Salle, a high site of intellectual exchange in France, allowed us to take the measure of this change. It brought together a good thirty renowned representatives of the social and human sciences – sociologists, but also anthropologists, philosophers, historians, geographers and economists – all of whom agreed on two crucial points in my view (Caillé *et al.*, 2018). (1) The first is the idea that in the humanities and social sciences, disciplinary specializations only have meaning and legitimacy if they are thought of as moments of a generalist social science that is too often lost from view. A generalist social science of which it is urgent to train ... specialists (on the model of generalists in medicine). (2) The second point of agreement, to my great and happy surprise I must say, was, even among economists, that the urgency is to overcome the current scientific and political hegemony of economic science, and that this can only be done on anti-utilitarian grounds. But the agreement now reached on anti-utilitarianism does not imply an agreement on what I call the gift paradigm, i.e. on the idea that in order to understand our human and social condition in all its complexity, we must start from (or return to) Mauss’ discovery. After all, isn’t it logical to start at the beginning, in other words, with what we know or understand about the way primitive societies function? And this is where I come back to the question of my editor, Sylvie Fenczak. Why is this book important to me? For three sets of reasons. First of all, it seems to me that the conception of gift that I am presenting here has now come to full maturity and that it is worthwhile to make it known in its generality and its coherence to the general public. This conception has been developed little by little, in successive stages, from hypothesis to hypothesis. Each step has had its readers but very few of them will have had the time and the availability to follow the path step by step, book after book. And, if I am not mistaken, if the gift is indeed “the general form of the relationship between human subjects insofar as they intend to consider themselves as persons recognized as such and valued in their singularity”, then it is clear that the question of the gift, of its nature and of its modalities, is the most important thing for all of us. And, in fact, I and my friends have noticed that each time we have exposed our reflections to a wide variety of audi-

ences, the general public, associative activists, managers, etc., they have met with an immediate response, as if they were finally putting into words what everyone feels more or less confusedly. This is because the question of the gift touches on life itself. But this book is not only for the general public. It is also intended for my colleagues in the humanities and social sciences. A certain number of them, as I have just said, recognize themselves in anti-utilitarianism. I would now like to try to convince them that the gift paradigm represents to date the most general anti-utilitarian formulation – non-economicist if one prefers – and the one best able to dialogue with a whole set of other existing theoretical constellations, for example the theories of care, or those of the struggle for recognition, pragmatist sociologies, the economics of conventions, connected history, anthropology, etc. None of them, of course, is reducible to the paradigm of the gift, but each can be translated into its language, illuminating and nourishing it in return. This is also true of one of the most promising advances in contemporary sociology, the theory of resonance developed by the German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa, already world-famous for his *Acceleration* and now for his latest book, *Resonance*. Between the paradigm of the gift and the theory of resonance, there are strong ... resonances. But in order to bring them out, to put the paradigm of the gift in effective dialogue with the constellations of thought that I have just named, we must go clearly and resolutely beyond what the discovery of Mauss alone allows us to think. It was necessary to make it explicit and to restore it in all its theoretical power against misleading or lazy interpretations. This is what I have done in my previous books on the gift. It was also necessary to show its links with the question of the struggle for recognition. But, beyond that, in order for it to take on its full philosophical or psychological significance, it is necessary not to limit the gift to relations between people and to extend it to the relationship of subjects to life, to nature and to creativity. This is what I propose to do here thanks to the concepts of “donation” and “adonation”.

Finally, under the name of convivialism, I have been trying for some years to contribute to the elaboration of a common language, at the same time theoretical, ethical and political, that can be shared by alternative intellectuals and civic activists of very diverse origins and ideological sensibilities. The *Convivialist Manifesto*, published in 2013, which sets out a whole series of points of agreement, translated into a dozen languages, is now beginning to be known and appreciated in many circles. It is the result of collective writing. But a number of its central theses are inspired by the gift paradigm. Convivialists will find here the main lines of an anthropology, of a vision of the human being, quite different from those that still

inspire the majority of existing political projects. Without an alternative anthropology, no other politics will be possible.

As I finish this foreword, I tell myself that yes, this book is important to me. More than all my previous ones, indeed.

1. INTRODUCTION TO EXTENSIONS OF THE GIFT DOMAIN

For nearly forty years now, the authors gathered around the *Revue du MAUSS* (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales) have been working, each in their own way, to develop all the implications of the discovery made by Marcel Mauss in his famous *Essay on the Gift* (1925), probably the most important text in the history of the social sciences as well as moral and political philosophy. This discovery could be summarized in a few words: social relationships are created and maintained by entering into the dynamics of what Mauss called the triple obligation of giving, receiving and returning. All this time, we have not ceased to be astonished and to marvel that this thesis, so simple in appearance, gives us so much to see, to think, to observe and to understand. However, we must now try to go beyond Mauss' discovery while at the same time remaining faithful to it. This is what the present book proposes to do. But before explaining why and how, it will perhaps be useful to present a brief history of the journal *La Revue du MAUSS*, because it is unique and provides a good illustration of the fecundity of the spirit of the gift, of the "spirit of the given thing", of its *hau*. This *hau*, explained by the Māori sage Ranapiri in a famous passage of the *Essay on the Gift*, that has become one of the most widely known and discussed concepts in the whole history of anthropology.

2. THE UNIQUE HISTORY OF MAUSS

The history of MAUSS begins in a modest way. In 1980, Gérald Berthoud, professor of Anthropology at the University of Lausanne, and I, then assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Caen, attended a conference on the gift. We were surprised to find that almost none of the participants, economists, philosophers or psychoanalysts, referred to Mauss, and that for all of them, the gift could only be an illusion, since – as seemed obvious to them – only personal interest, more or less hidden, guides our actions. For my part, I was astonished at the same time by the economicist and individualist trends (one spoke at that time of "methodological individualism") that were affecting the social sciences, biology and political philosophy. We

then decided, with a few friends from various disciplines, to create a sort of liaison bulletin between those who shared our surprise and concern. We called it *Bulletin du MAUSS*, which allowed us to kill two birds with one stone by criticizing, on the one hand, utilitarianism, which seemed to us to be the matrix of the economic drift we were denouncing, and, on the other hand, to pay homage to Marcel Mauss. Without having the slightest awareness of it at the time, when we were only thinking of resisting economism with the means at hand, it was a powerful research program that entailed both a critical aspect – challenging utilitarianism and economism – and a constructive dimension (the elaboration of what we were going to call, some fifteen years later, “the gift paradigm”).

The means at our disposal were, to say the least, very limited, and they have remained so. Without the symbolic and financial support of any institution or research laboratory, we had to do everything by ourselves. The articles that we published in the *Bulletin du MAUSS* were simply photocopied, those that we wrote were typed on old typewriters that made stencils, we designed the covers (which did not last very long) with ... decals, and the whole was printed in offset. I was helped in this by three young doctoral students in economics, Rigas Arvanitis, Cengiz Aktar and Ahmet Insel who distributed copies in the bookshops of the Latin Quarter. Rigas, who has since become more of a sociologist than an economist, was until 2020 the director of the IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement). Cengiz, professor at the Bahçeşehir University of Istanbul, closed by Erdogan's government, is in Turkey the best known advocate of accession to the European Union. Ahmet, former vice-president of the University of Paris I, creator of the Franco-Turkish University of Galatasaray, is the main columnist of the famous newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, whose managing team is currently in prison. Both of them, together with three other well-known Turkish intellectuals, are behind the request for an apology to the Armenians for the genocide they suffered. Both are now banned from entering Turkey. Curiously, M. Thorel, the person in charge of the social science and philosophy departments of the PUF bookstore on the Place de la Sorbonne, took a liking to us and deposited stacks of our review near the cash register. Despite the cobbled-together appearance, which was puzzling even at the time, we were quickly read by a number of academics, particularly foreigners, who were intrigued, and wanted to see what was happening in France. From the very first issue we received the support of two great names in social science, who had sympathized with the declaration of intent published in our first issue: the economist Albert Hirschman and the philosopher Charles Taylor. Good fairies, we surmise, had bent over our improvised cradle.

A few years later, we had gained enough of an audience for the publisher La Découverte to offer to take us under their wing. Thus began a second period of the journal. The *Bulletin* became *La Revue du MAUSS*, which appeared from 1988 to 1992 with a mouse-gray cover, and a much larger circulation. It was necessary to become serious, and this was fortunate – even if some regretted it – because the number of authors who were sympathetic to the journal increased considerably. So much so that it became tempting to publish their books. That's when we had to revise our agreement with our publisher. In 1993, while continuing to benefit from distribution through the La Découverte network and under its label, we thus resumed our autonomy, assuming all the production costs of both the journal – which became *La Revue semestrielle du MAUSS* – and the collection of “La Bibliothèque du MAUSS” (The MAUSS Library), which was then launched and would go on to publish nearly seventy titles – and still counting.

What is interesting in this history, and why I thought it appropriate to point out some of its highlights, is that this scientific adventure developed without any institutional support. I don't think there is any other example. If we have been able to hold on until now without deviating from the initial project, it is because it was not merely technical. The critique of economism, the reflection on the power but also the dangers and ambivalences of the gift, all this speaks to many people who very quickly perceive what is at stake ethically, existentially and politically. This is what allowed us to reach a financial viability, obviously very precarious, but in the end sufficient to survive until now despite some delicate moments.

The other side of the coin, the downside, has been, for a long time, a certain academic invisibility. As we did not belong to any particular discipline – anthropology, economics, sociology, philosophy, etc. – but to all of them, and as we did not claim to belong to any of the established schools (we even criticized them), it was almost forbidden to mention us in these different fields. And since we had no institutional identity, we did not fit into the usual identification systems, so people wondered what was behind it all. Some of the criticisms that were addressed to us (and occasionally still are) were of a rare indigence. They seemed to think – or pretended to – that since we were criticizing what I have called the axiomatics of interest – the monism of the explanation by interest – it was because we believed that human relations were based on charity and altruism. They were strangely oblivious of the fact that the gift studied by Mauss is an “agonistic gift”, a kind of war by the gift. A war that allows us to avoid war and conflict, but which nevertheless contains violence.

Gradually, however, suspicions have dissipated, and criticisms have become rarer. Even if, seen from the heart of each particular discipline,

the journal remains largely a USO, an Unidentified Scientific Object, it now enjoys fairly general respect and esteem. What is it that earns us this attention, even though we still have no means and no institutional support that would guarantee us a principled academic legitimacy? There are three factors which, I believe, are complementary: first of all, since we do not depend on any school or any established organization, we do not appear to be a threat to anybody. Symmetrically, the magazine has always chosen a radical pluralism, opening its pages to all opinions, including those most opposed to its own, betting that one can only progress by confronting opponents who must be considered to have the strongest arguments, and not by insulting them, or by pretending not to know them. Finally, and this is the decisive point I wanted to get to and which justifies this detour through the history of the MAUSS, the paradigm of the gift – the theorization in social science and in political philosophy resulting from the discovery of Mauss – does not contest the legitimacy of any particular school of thought. Each one seems to us to express a part of the truth and helps us understand effectively a dimension of human and social reality. But none of them makes room, or only in a very insufficient and debatable way, for the question of the gift, which is nevertheless essential if, as we said at the outset, social relationships are created and maintained by the gift. To each of the existing approaches or schools in the social sciences we say:

Yes, what you see and what you show is interesting, but wouldn't it be even more interesting if you widened your field of vision to include the gift? And, by putting on the tinted glasses of the gift, wouldn't you be led to have further insights into whatever you thought you had perfectly identified?

The paradigm of the gift, on the other hand, does not claim to possess any particular *a priori* truth. The gift, as discovered by Mauss, constitutes what he called a "total social phenomenon". The concept, it is true, is uncertain and open to discussion. Let us simply agree that the archaic gift mixes dimensions at the same time economic, political, social and symbolic. I was saying just now that the various schools of the social sciences (and humanities) miss the essential reality of the gift. But, conversely, the paradigm of the gift would remain impotent if it did not rely on them. Let us say, therefore, that it functions as an operator of translation. Or, rather, it develops its own discourse, but this discourse is constantly enriched by the translation it makes of other already existing discourses. In another field, that of political philosophy, one could say that convivialism, resulting from the reflections carried out within MAUSS, is inspired by the same logic. It presents itself as an operator of translation, but also of actualization and sursomption (*Aufhebung*) of liberalism, socialism, communism and anar-

chism. As an operator of translation, both actualizing and reaching beyond liberalism, etc.?

In order to accomplish this work of translation, however, so that the paradigm of the gift functions as a shuttle that allows us to weave together discourses or approaches to which it might seem foreign, we must go beyond Mauss' initial discovery to give it sufficient generality. It is necessary to proceed to extending the domain of the gift. And that is the whole purpose of this book.

3. WHICH GIFT?

Such an extension cannot take place without an indispensable clarification of the term "gift" itself. Few words, in fact, are as full of multiple meanings, ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty, few carry as many expectations and hopes, or, on the contrary, disdain and rejection, as the "gift". Perhaps none. Yet, or precisely for this reason, it is indeed from here that we must start if we want to grasp some of the central questions of moral and political philosophy, or of social science, without letting ourselves be discouraged by their infinite fragmentation into rival doctrines, disciplines and sub-disciplines. And to understand, more generally and more simply, the questions that we face in everyday life, the questions of life itself.

But is it on the word or on the practices of the gift that we must concentrate? One will be tempted by the latter, to grant primacy to the practice over the word, as the word does not exist in all languages. Not, in any case, with the same breadth of meaning as that found in Indo-European languages. But how can we observe the thing, the practices of giving, if we do not have a word that allows us to identify them by distinguishing them from those that do not have to do with giving? It is therefore essential, in order to break out of this circle, to start trying to see the uses of the word "gift" with some clarity.

In French, as the linguist Lucien Tesnière pointed out, *donner* (to give) is, along with the verb *dire* (to say), the typical example of a "trivalent" verb, that is, a verb that necessarily puts three "actants", in relation to each other, the giver, the receiver and the object given (Tesnière, 1959; Meng, 2015; Descombes, 2017). In French, we can give so many things – from the most precious gifts to the most violent blows, life, birth or death, a piece of flank steak at the butcher's, a *baguette* at the baker's, a kick or a hand, hope or regret, to see or to think, etc. – that "to give" plays a role that is almost as important as "to have" or "to be". But, beyond the syntactic functions of the verb, one cause of the profusion of meanings attached to

the word “gift” is, of course, the crucial role it has played throughout the history of Christianity, a history of which we are the heirs, whether we like it or not. Christianity obliges believers to give (and to give themselves). To give out of love, without calculation, without expectation of return, in such a way that, as the gospel according to Saint Matthew says, “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing”. With this injunction, giving appears to be simultaneously the effect, the mark and the proof of love. The gift and love thus seem indissolubly linked. Just as it is sometimes said (especially in the Anglo-Saxon world) that there is no friendship but only proofs of friendship, one could say that for Christianity only the gift bears witness to the reality of love.

But what kind of love? We know that it is mainly through Greek that the gospels and the words of Christ circulated in Antiquity. The Greek language distinguishes three varieties of what we understand by love: *eros*, which is of the order of desire, *philia*, which is of the order of shared and reciprocal friendship, and *agape*, which designates unconditional and asymmetrical love, that of, as Christianity would say, God towards his ungrateful children. A love all the more beautiful and properly divine, moreover, since the children do not deserve it in any way. What model of love should the Church or the religious authorities encourage? *Agape* alone, or *agape* with a touch of *philia*, or even a touch of *eros*? It is around this question that many of the great theological debates that have taken place over the centuries have revolved. In the field of Catholicism, it is in the 17th century, in France, with the quarrel known as “pure love”, that the debate was the most lively. Taking over peacefully, in a way, the debates on the nature and conditions of grace that had fueled the wars of religion and the related massacres in the previous century, it opposed the two greatest preachers of the time, Fénelon (1651-1715) and Bossuet (1627-1704).

Should one love God for his own sake or with a view to gaining heaven through a love for which God would be grateful? One must love him for himself, and without any personal interest, answered Madame Guyon, a mystic supported at the Court of Louis XIV by his pious mistress, Madame de Maintenon. Yes, but how to be assured of the purity of this love? By what one could call a test of love that Madame Guyon presents under the name “impossible supposition”. “Let us suppose”, she wrote, “that God has damned me for eternity, I should nevertheless love him with all my soul”. To which, at the risk of contradicting Saint Augustine (whom he defends too and following whom there are only very few predestined elected), Bossuet answered by attempting to reconcile self-interested love of oneself and disinterested love of God. He affirmed that to desire one’s salvation is to respond to the purpose for which God created us; eternal beatitude. In

short, we must love God because he only wants our good (Terestchenko, 2000). He therefore wants us to be concerned about ourselves.

At the same time, however, the discussion changed its meaning and nature by placing at the root of all human actions not the obligation of love but the sinister reality of interest (Hirschman, 1977). Behind the most apparently noble sentiments, the Jansenist “Gentlemen” of the abbey of Port-Royal, wanted to see only vanity and self-love at work. “The self is hateful”, wrote Pascal, their disciple, who explained that the best calculation of interest, the most profitable, is to believe in God. In the same vein, La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), the most forceful and best known of those who would later be called the French moralists, wrote, in the first sentence of the first edition of his *Maxims*:

Self-love is the love of oneself, and of all things for oneself; it makes men idolaters of themselves and would make them tyrants of others if fortune gave them the means [...] It lives everywhere and it lives on everything; it lives on nothing [...] and, as long as it is, it is willing to be its enemy. [And he specified:] Interest is the soul of self-love.

But already Hobbes (1588-1679) in England, in his famous *Leviathan*, which can rightly be considered to be the matrix of all modern political philosophy, had developed even darker views on human nature:

The passions which, more than all the others, cause differences of mind, are principally the desire, more or less great, for power, riches, knowledge and honor. But all these desires can be reduced to the first, that is to say, to the desire for power. For wealth, knowledge and honor are but various kinds of power.

Or again:

Thus I put in the first place, as a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and unceasing desire to acquire power after power, a desire which ceases only at death.

For two or three centuries, the exchanges between the French and the English, soon joined by the Germans, would continue on this theme, inaugurating what the writer Nathalie Sarraute would rightly call the era of suspicion. A suspicion that will affect all spheres of social or individual existence, all our acts and thoughts, always to be accused of impurity and conscious or, more likely, unconscious hypocrisy. Its great masters will be Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. And the object of suspicion par excellence will be the gift, and its supposed correlates, love, altruism, generosity, disinterestedness, etc.

4. POLITICAL ECONOMY AND SOCIOLOGY

The social sciences for their part were born in the same space of general suspicion that had been in place since Hobbes and the French moralists. At the end of the 18th century for political economy, at the beginning of the 19th century for sociology. We can see perfectly what is at stake with this birth of the social sciences from the first pages of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), which is generally considered to be the first book of scientific economics:

When a man has no other means of engaging them (his fellow men) to act according to his inclinations, (he) endeavours by every servile and fawning attention to obtain their good will. He has not time, however, to do this upon every occasion. In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons.

What is targeted here, in this denunciation of “servile attentions”, is the totality of the relations of gift and return through which one makes friends. Not only are these relations vile, we debase ourselves by cultivating them, but they take time. A lifetime would not be enough. The economic science that was born at that time was thus presented as the scientific invention that would allow us to save time. This time, which we have known since Benjamin Franklin, is money. But what is less well known is that to save it, what must be saved first, or even eliminated, is the gift.

This marks the end of all the questions about the different types of gift – or love – possible, about their combinations and their earthly or cosmic destiny, about what they can bring us here below or postmortem. It is a social order freed from all transcendence that will have to be built. It will obey only one motive, only one watchword: interest. The individual interest or the sum of the individual interests whose composition will allow, according to the formula of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the pope of utilitarian doctrine, to lead to the “greatest happiness of the greatest number”. The canonical formula of the new purpose for the world is given by Smith at the very beginning, again, of *The Wealth of Nations*:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the beer merchant, and the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love; and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

If we look closely, this formulation is not nearly as original and innovative as is often said. Three centuries before Christ, the Chinese philosopher of

the legalist school, Han-Fei-tse, had already written, in opposition to the Confucians:

If a doctor sucks the boils [...] of his patients, without being related to them, it is because he has an interest in doing so [...]. The carpenter (who makes coffins) does not hate his fellow human beings, he only has an interest in their death. (Han-Fei-Tse, 1999)

Or again:

Altruism excites hatred: self-interest ensures harmony. Animosity and conflicts set parents and children against each other, whereas it is enough to give fat broth to one's workers to be well served. (p. 23)

And, finally:

A prince maintains his subordinates by calculation, as they serve him by calculation.

Thus, the common basis of their relationship is calculation [...]. Calculation is therefore the only link between prince and subject. (p. 23)

Conversely, Adam Smith was much less of a champion of the rule of interest than is generally claimed. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, written before and revised after *The Wealth of Nations*, he places at the heart of human relations not interest but "sympathy", which today we would call empathy.

Nevertheless, from this period, a new era begins, which even before becoming the era of suspicion will prove to be the era of the domination of the economy over all the other dimensions of social existence that had seemed primordial until then: religion, political power and the person-to-person links sealed by gift relationships, whether in the domain of solidarity and loyalty or that of subjugation to hierarchical superiors, nobles or priests. It is a society without gifts, without religion and without political power that is beginning to be invented. Its only regulator and its only cement would have to be in principle material interest however it is calculated.

Is such a society, in which only individual interest would reign, viable? No, answers sociology, whose beginnings are classically traced back to Saint-Simon (1760-1825), father of Saint-Simonism, so important for the industrialization of France, and to his disciple Auguste Comte, inventor of the term "sociology". From the beginning, sociology has seen itself as the Other of economic science, both its double and its rival. From political economy it borrows the aim of a purely objective and scientific analysis of social relations. But it objects that these cannot and should not be reduced to market relations alone, and that human subjects are infinitely more complex than the sad and poor figure of *homo oeconomicus*, on which the whole edifice of standard economic science rests (Laval, 2002). Of course, each of

the great names of the sociological tradition, Tocqueville, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, etc., will say this in a particular way, and with a different political aim: liberalism for Tocqueville or Weber, communism for Marx, republican socialism for Durkheim. But this opposition to economic reductionism, shared, supported and developed, in their great majority, by historians as well as philosophers and ethnologists, will remain a constant of the discipline and of the whole of the social sciences until the 1970s and 1980s.

What happened then? A profound change in the relationship between the various social science disciplines. In those years, economists, who for two centuries had limited their object of study to market relations alone, began to apply their explanatory models to all social activities, to the family, to education, to politics, to religion, and so on. To put it another way, they set out to generalize the model of *homo oeconomicus* and to turn economic science into the general social science that sociology, despite its initial ambitions, had failed to become. To do this, it is enough to state that in all our social, family, romantic, and professional relationships, we behave in all circumstances, consciously or unconsciously, as buyers and sellers, eager to buy at the best price and to sell at the highest possible price, even if we do not pay and are not paid always and everywhere in money, but in love, power, or prestige.

5. MARCEL MAUSS' "ESSAY ON THE GIFT" AND MAUSS: A MIDDLE WAY

What surprised us then – flabbergasted us – my friends and I, who were going to create in 1981 *La Revue du MAUSS* (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales), was that this claim of the economists for hegemony met with broad support everywhere in the other social sciences. Everywhere, whether in sociology, in political philosophy, in biology (but less so in history or ethnology), the language of the economists, the theory of rational choice, alias the rational action theory, was being spoken. Or, more generally, what I have called the axiomatics of interest. The most influential book of the end of the 20th century in political philosophy, John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971), for example, is written entirely in this language. In a few years, this upheaval in the division of intellectual labor was to be followed by globalization, i.e. serial deregulations, the worldwide reign of markets and today, increasingly, that of financial and speculative markets. If we are only economic people, nothing should prevent us from trying to earn as much money as possible, by all possible means, as quickly as possible. That alone is important.

The *Revue du MAUSS* has prioritized the scientific resistance to this economist groundswell¹. It is based, first and foremost, on the famous *Essay on the Gift* (1925), by Marcel Mauss, disciple and intellectual heir of Émile Durkheim, the primary inspiration of all French scientific ethnology. Two lessons from Mauss, among many others, are absolutely essential for any serious academic struggle against the axiomatics of interest. The first is that “man has not always been an economic animal, coupled with a calculating machine”. The second is that early societies (let us call them that) were not based on the market or on contracts but on what Mauss calls the triple obligation of giving, receiving and returning. In short, let us say that they were based on giving.

On the gift? How many misunderstandings and counter-understandings, more or less well meaning, emerged around this question? How many lawsuits of intent have we had to endure for recalling Mauss’ essential empirical discovery! It is because at the time the very word “gift” had become almost unpronounceable, almost obscene. Pierre Bourdieu and a good part of the left denounced the ideology of the gift in the field of education for a start. (In another sense, it is true, of the word “gift”, but which we shall see is not completely unrelated to the first.) Since we criticized the academic omnipresence of the axiomatics of interest, we were thought to believe, as I have already said, that we could explain human action by love and altruism (Lordon, 2006). That we were advocating a return to charity, or something of the kind. A few years later, in the opposite direction, by a sort of pendulum swing, we witnessed in the early 1990s a return in force of reflection on the gift in the philosophical field. And, more precisely, within the framework of the phenomenological tradition, inaugurated by Husserl and extended by Heidegger. Strangely enough, this philosophical return of the gift made it almost as unthinkable as its exclusion or repression.

In order to give full scope to Mauss’ discovery, we had to fight on two fronts, facing a double problem with the gift. The first is easily identifiable. It results from the omnipresence of the axiomatics of interest, which dominated the whole of economics, of course, but also a large part of sociology,

¹ Which, since the years 2000-2010, no longer presents itself exactly in the way I have just described, in a few words briefly and therefore in an excessively crude manner—rather broadly. The dominant language in social science or in moral and political philosophy is no longer that of rational choice theory, the lingua franca of economists, but that of deconstructionism or deconstructivism. It is about showing that everything is “constructed” and therefore deconstructable at will. It is not difficult, however, to see the elective affinities between *homo aeconomicus* and *homo deconstructivus*; Marx and Engels said it perfectly in the *Communist Manifesto*. Under the rule of the market, “all that is solid melts into air”.

biology (via sociobiology in particular), a branch of psychoanalysis, etc. If everything can be explained by interest, then the very idea of the gift vanishes. The gift can only be a mask of interest, conscious or unconscious, a way of “winning the good graces (of others) by flattery and servile attentions”, according to Adam Smith.

But the phenomenological rehabilitation of the gift, radically opposed in appearance to the axiomatics of interest, was also to lead, under the guise of aiming to release the pure essence of the gift, to the conclusion that it cannot be of this world. “If I give, then I do not give”, wrote the world-famous champion of “deconstruction”, the philosopher Jacques Derrida, meaning that if I know that I give, I see myself giving and derive glory or narcissistic satisfaction from it. I have an interest in it and, since I am interested in it, I am not a real donor. The gift thus appears for him as “the figure of the impossible” (Derrida, 1991). Did Mauss believe he had seen the gift in the first society? He was mistaken, said Derrida. There is no gift because there is a return, in the practices described by Mauss, and this return is expected or hoped for. What Mauss took for a gift is only an exchange. The true gift, to be such, should be absolutely disinterested, without intention, close to sacrifice. Another well-known philosopher, Jean-Luc Marion, went further (Marion, 1997), explaining that for there to be a gift (by which he means a “true” gift), there must be neither a subject who gives, nor an object given, nor a recipient of the gift. We will quickly understand the reason for such a disconcerting and, in fact, discouraging statement. To fully assess Mauss’ essential discovery, it is necessary to extricate oneself from a double “inexistentialism” (I borrow this useful term from Marcel Gauchet), from the two symmetrical statements which affirm that the gift does not exist. The first, which reduces the gift to one form or another of exchange, to a purchase; the second, which, returning to the doctrine of pure love, sees it to be a gift only where there is a radical sacrifice of the interests of the donor, and/or unconsciousness. And, therefore, does not want to see it anywhere.

It is important, however, to understand the reasons for the blunder of such sharp minds as Derrida or Marion (a blunder that was also partly made by that of the one we can call the second Levinas). On a strictly conceptual level, and if we do not stop at the ethical or political motivations of the one or the other, it is due to a confusion between “gift” and “donation”, and also between “interest” (*intérêt*) and “interestedness” (*intéressement*). Confusion that applies to both inexistentialisms. Because one cannot obviously accomplish anything without any interest in what he one does, both discourses wrongly conclude to the impossibility of disinterestedness, of acting without a material or purely narcissistic interest. Let

us put it another way and say with Amartya Sen that one can be a rational fool.

The German philosophical concept of *Gegebenheit*, translated into philosophical French as *donation*, accounts for the fact that “there is something rather than nothing”, that this something is there, as if it had been given, given by nobody to nobody in particular but given all the same, and that it must therefore be considered to be a gift. This conceptualization is made possible, and almost self-evident, by the fact that in German, “there is” is said *es gibt*, “it gives”. Within this framework of thought it is obviously possible, and tempting for some, to imagine a great subject of the gift: God or an equivalent of God. But, as the physicist Laplace said to Napoleon, “we don’t need this hypothesis”, and everyone is free here to use it or not. Our phenomenologists abusively apply to the gift, that is to say to a relation between subjects, what could only be valid for donation, that is to say a relation without subjects. A fatal misunderstanding. Which does not prevent us from making use of this notion of donation in a more reasonable way. But before that, we must be interested in the gift itself, and study it in its human, very human, existence, without dissolving it either into barter, exchange, contract and market, on the one hand, or into charity, altruism, sacrifice or donation, on the other.

It is to this task that *La Revue du MAUSS* was going to address itself. It is impossible to summarize here what has been thought and discovered through the more than fifteen hundred articles published since 1981, many of them rather long and substantial. Without counting the seventy or so books published in the framework of the collection “Bibliothèque du MAUSS”. Around the journal formed a whole informal international nebula of teachers, researchers, economists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, philosophers, essayists, and other free and unclassifiable authors. Some of them are directly sensitive to the attempt to draw out all the implications of Mauss’ discoveries (or of authors in strong consonance with them, Karl Polanyi, Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, André Gorz, Marshall Sahlins, Jan Huizinga, René Girard, Louis Dumont, etc.), others were simply attracted by a reputation for intellectual quality and respect for pluralism. Of the “gift paradigm” that has gradually emerged from this work, of this commitment to observing social relations by asking how the triple obligation to give, receive and return functions in a specific way each time, I will only consider here a few elements.

Mauss explained that the terms used in the *Essay on the Gift*, “present, gift, donation, are not themselves entirely accurate”, and immediately added: “We cannot find any other, that’s all” (Mauss, 1966, p. 267). Uncertain about the right name, he speaks sometimes of exchange-gift,

sometimes of gift-exchange to make us understand that the practices of the gift do exist within the framework of what it is possible to call the first societies (*sociétés premières*), and that they are not reducible either to exchange and barter, or to radical disinterestedness. Neither to egoism nor to altruism, if we prefer. There is a *sui generis* reality of the gift that cannot be explained by anything other than itself. What inspires the gift is “neither the purely free and purely gratuitous service, nor that of the purely interested production and exchange of the useful”. And he concludes: “It is a kind of hybrid that has blossomed there” (Mauss, 1966, p. 267). This is a way out of many of the quarrels about the essence of the gift. The gift is not made unconsciously, without expectation of return. One hopes that the person to whom one has given will give back, or rather will give in turn (to oneself or to another), but one is by no means certain of that. It is this dimension of uncertainty and gamble, this margin of play that characterizes the gift between human subjects. The gift is not free, but there is a dimension or a share of gratuity within it, if only in the form of a margin of play between giving, receiving and returning.

Let’s be more precise. At the same time gift and exchange, exchange and gift, the gift as analyzed by Mauss, the agonistic gift, comprises a part of unconditionality and a part of conditionality, of giving and receiving, of *do ut des*. A part of unconditionality since it accepts the risk that the other does not give back. One is not obliged to give in turn, or only indirectly. It is this dimension of unconditionality that seals the alliance. For the gift is a covenant operator. It is what makes us friends rather than enemies. In this sense, far from charity, which will only appear much later, in its wake, with the birth of the great universalist religions, it is a properly political act. But if in the alliance one does not feel right, if, within the framework of the founding unconditionality, one of the parties feels wronged, then one begins to review one’s accounts so as to work it out and to settle the score. The regime of the gift is thus neither that of strict unconditionality put forward by the supporters of pure love or pure gift, nor that of the general conditionality which only those who stick to the axiomatics of interest want to know. It is that of conditional unconditionality (Caillé, 2000 [2006]). Or again, it obeys neither the sole interest for oneself nor the sole interest for others (“lovingness”). Made within the framework of an obligation, the social obligation to give, receive and return, it manifests its strength, its effectiveness, its power, only if it testifies to the freedom and creativity of the giver and if it leaves the receiver the freedom in return to give back or not to give back. To give back sooner or later, equally, on parity, or in subtly differing amounts less or more, etc. In the gift, as in any human action, there are four primary motives, organized in two crossed

pairs: interest for oneself (*intérêt pour soi*) and interest for others, (*intérêt pour autrui*) on the one hand, obligation and freedom-creativity (*libercréativité*) on the other (Caillé, 2009).

This Maussian conception of the gift provides an assured starting point, both empirically founded and sufficiently clarified (in all its ambiguity), for both empirical research in the social sciences and analyses developed in the field of moral and political philosophy. To the former, it gives to see a social state in which law, economy, politics, religion, kinship and sociality are not yet disjointed and where the gift manifests itself as what Mauss calls a total social phenomenon (or fact). To moral and political philosophy it offers the possibility of considering a kind of original state of morality – what Mauss presented as “the rock of eternal morality” – and of politics.

But what does this have to do with contemporary societies? One of the great advances made by the MAUSS is to have shown that far from representing a residual phenomenon, limited to Christmas or birthday gifts, for example, giving is still very much present today within the framework of *primary sociality*, the set of person-to-person relationships in which, from the family to friendship or the world of small groups, the personality of people matters more than what they do (Godbout & Caillé, 2000). And that even in the sphere of impersonal and functional relations which are, in theory, those which govern the world of secondary sociality (of the market, of business, of administrations, of science, etc.), where functional efficiency matters more than the personality of the persons who perform them, as the functions are in reality always accomplished by concrete persons it is largely the quality of the relations of gift and counter-gift which bind them that is the determinant of their functional effectiveness (Alter, 2009; Caillé & Grésy, 2014). From this discovery it is possible to deploy the paradigm of the gift in the most varied fields, from medicine to business, from sport to the family or the world of voluntary associations, etc. (Chaniel, 2008).

6. FROM THE SIMPLE GIFT PARADIGM TO THE EXTENDED GIFT PARADIGM

To give it its full scope, however, Mauss’ discovery must first of all be clarified, made explicit and completed, but also extended and generalized. Particularly attentive to the richness and complexity of social realities, Mauss was excessively suspicious of all speculative conceptualizations. An enemy of misplaced abstractions, he is nevertheless a theorist of extraordinary scope, but many of his theories remain implicit, as if buried under the

abundance of factual material. Part of the work of MAUSS has consisted in making fully visible and explicit a whole set of Mauss' theses, that were never clearly stated as such or not fully developed. Such is the case, for example, of the link between the gift and the struggle for recognition. That through agonistic giving, the rivalry to give, (which is the subject of the *Essay on Giving*), what is sought is recognition, appears as obvious in many passages of the *Essay*. By giving, I recognize the value of the donee (or his clan) and at the same time I affirm my own value (or that of my clan). But the evidence for this must be clearly formulated in order to ensure that the reflection on the gift is related to all the literature, so important today, which deals with the struggle for recognition. And, reciprocally, to enrich this debate, initiated in the wake of Hegel by thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth or Nancy Fraser, by showing how recognition is primarily recognition of a gift (or a donation).

In the same way, one should not hesitate to go beyond Mauss' proposal where it is clearly incomplete. This is the case with the theme of the triple obligation to give, receive and return. To have identified and named it represents a real scientific feat on the part of Mauss, which allows us to understand how, in the course of our existence, we find ourselves caught up in multiple networks of giving, in which we are alternately donors, indebted receivers, or donors in return, more or less freed from our debt of gratitude. But, on reflection, it soon becomes clear that this cycle could not function if it were not animated by a fourth moment (which largely escapes the register of social obligation because it refers to the fragility of the individual subject), the moment of the demand, whether this demand has been formulated explicitly or simply anticipated – guessed at – by the donor. What sense would there be in a gift that did not respond to any desire, to any need, yearning or expectation of the donee? The complete cycle of the gift is therefore that of asking (or demanding), giving, receiving and returning (DGRR). But this is the cycle that takes place when everything goes well, i.e. when the gift functions as a shuttle braiding together all the threads that link the social actors together. Let us call it the symbolic cycle of giving, taking up the etymology of the word symbol: that which brings together. This symbolic cycle, however, exists only through its victory, often precarious and always to be renewed, over the opposite cycle, the diabolical cycle (which separates) of ignoring, taking, refusing, keeping (ITRK). With this precision, we begin to have an appreciable number of elements of a basic grammar of social relations (Caillé & Grésy, 2018). All of this is fully thinkable within the framework of what might be called the simple gift paradigm, which rests on the perspective of a norm of parity, or simple reciprocity between givers and recipients.

In order for the gift not to hurt or destroy the recipient, rather than benefiting him or her, the recipient must be able to become a donor in turn. This is perhaps the primary lesson of the *Essay on the Gift*. But if we want the gift paradigm to be able to enter fully into a fruitful dialogue with other paradigms or currents of thought in philosophy and social science, or better, to appear as their greatest common denominator, the one in which – I hope – all are likely to be translated, and derive more clarity from it, then we need to switch from a simple gift paradigm to an extended gift paradigm.

In order to bring the theories of the struggle for recognition into dialogue with the theories of giving, it does not seem essential to leave the simple gift paradigm, even if its extension brings new insights. However, it is impossible to remain with a notion of simple reciprocity if we want to enter into resonance with, for example, the theories of care, which are so important in contemporary discussions, and all the more so since, beyond the reflections on the relationship of care, solicitude or attention to others, care thinking orients the feminist debate in particular onto new paths: why and how are women traditionally assigned to care giving? The connection with the question of gift is obvious here. Even if some authors, precisely in order to avoid the assignment of women to what alienates them, try to think of care as work, it is clear, assuming that it can indeed be understood as work, that care can only be effective, helpful or curative, if it includes a dimension of gift. But this dimension of gift cannot be apprehended in a logic of simple reciprocity. What can the newly born child give back? Even more, what gift in return can we expect from a sick person at the end of his or her life, from an insane person or a bedridden old person, etc. (Chaniel, 2012)? The gift of care to them does not, however, lead one to leave the register of the Maussian gift, if one accepts to reason in terms of a generalized reciprocity. In such cases, what I give to those who are in no condition to ever be able to give back to me, I can hope that it will be given back to me by others if I find myself in the same situation as they are. This is a first extension of the domain of the gift.

This extension is insufficient, however, to begin to think about a whole series of other phenomena, which are nonetheless crucially important. Do sportsmen and women, for example, at the time of a great match, not say that they have given their all, that they have “given everything”? But the same is true of the activity of the fervent artist or the austere scientist, of the craftsman or the simple employee who “gives himself” to his task, of the entrepreneur, the farmer or the executive who does not count their hours. And so on. All these implications are forms of a generosity that is not, or not directly, a gift to others. This is another type of gift. A gift to

the task at hand, to creativity, to the movement of life itself (Raynal, 2016). To becoming. I propose to speak of “adonation” (*adonnement*)² to designate this commitment to what the philosopher Hannah Arendt classified under the register of action, the capacity to make something new happen, something never seen, never heard, by which the capacity of humans to show themselves to others in their singularity, to become subjects, is manifested. Pierre Bourdieu used the term *illusio* to designate more or less the same idea, but the use of such a term made sure to miss its object from the outset. The term *illusio* was intended to replace (most likely following criticism by MAUSS) the reference to interest, omnipresent in the first Bourdieu. He wanted to signify that one cannot engage in a given field of activity without being caught up in the game, without being *in ludum* (in the game). But the term *illusio* implies from the outset that all action is illusory. Abandoning the rhetoric of interest without having made the indispensable distinction between interest for (*l'intérêt pour*, the passionate interest) and interest in (*l'intérêt à*, the instrumental interest), or between interest and investment, he reconduces the idea that any interest for an activity whatever it be is in the last instance only the mask of an instrumental interest. Jansenism not dead.

“The wind *adonates* (*adonne*), speaking of a sailing ship, when it turns in a direction favorable to travel, that is, when it comes more to the rear”, the *French Dictionary of Maritime Terms* tells us. We sail, we go forward when a favorable wind pushes us. But where does this wind come from? When was it born? What is its nature? It results from a gift, you might say. A gift for painting, for music, for mathematics, for soccer, tennis, skiing, for whatever. This is a new meaning of the word gift. We must take seriously the similarities with the Maussian gift, as the poet-philosopher Lewis Hyde makes clear about the artist’s gift (Hyde, 1979). The artist is only fully such (at least before the appearance of artist-speculators) when he knows how to relate to the gift he has received in the same way that in early society, it was necessary to know how to return a precious good, with a surplus and above all not to keep it for oneself.

One can wonder at leisure about the origin of such gifts. But in one way or another, we can see that they refer us to a dimension of life that exceeds the sole field of intersubjective social relations, of the gift between humans. Starting with life itself, and all that accompanies it, the energy,

² The word adonation does not exist in English, but neither does the word *adonnement* in French, where is only used the verb *s'adonner*. The best translation would be “dedication”, but I think it is useful to elaborate a semantic field as coherent as possible between gift (*don*), donation (*Gegebenheit*), adonation (*adonnement*) and donativity.

the rhythm, the grace or its lack, the graceful or its absence. And, following them, charisma, inspiration, power, etc. It is here that we must reappropriate the concept of donation by putting it back on its feet, as it were. As we have seen, philosophers of phenomenological inspiration lead us astray by proposing to think of the gift with a model of donation as a gift without subject and without intentionality, thus making the gift by and between humans unthinkable. On the other hand, it is essential to recognize that an infinite number of things, the most precious without doubt, are as if given to us: life, as I have just said, but also nature, the cosmos in all its diversity, and even in a sense the plurality of cultures, of forms of life, and everything that we receive as an inheritance. All of this, even the totality of the history of art, music, literature, science, technology, etc., is in a sense given to us, far beyond what our friends or relatives can pass on to us, all those of whom we are the direct beneficiaries or legatees. Even if this gift is the gift of no one, of no subject (or else of an infinite and indeterminate multitude of subjects), even if it is not strictly speaking addressed to us, we must nonetheless consider it as such, as a gift, recognize it, feel gratitude for it, because we cannot live fully without it. *I therefore propose, instead of thinking of the gift as a donation without subject, to think of donation (without subject) as a quasi-gift.*

7. APPLICATIONS OF THE GIFT PARADIGM

This is why sport, which multiplies the gift contained in the game (or the game contained in the gift), has become the world's first, if not only, religion. The only world religion, together with that of consumption, whose hold on us would be difficult to understand if we underestimated the imaginary relationship it induces to "donation", and which incites us to devote ourselves to the realm of goods or brands.

In the field of art, one will speak about inspiration. The interest of thinking about gift, adonation and donation, together in their interdependence, is to allow us to treat subjects that are often approached with emphasis, in a more or less mystical mode, without falling into mysticism in our turn. As we have seen, the Maussian conception of the gift is modest, resolutely claiming its "mediocrity", as against those who conceive of it only as identical to pure love. I sketch some features of what a modest conception of art might look like. In the field of art, one often speaks of inspiration. This implies, I argue that it is important not to see in the artist a pure genius, that is to say the recipient of a gift without equal, without how and without why, i.e. as a unique elect, chosen by a superior

instance, giving to the humanity an equally unilateral gift of his work, that no return could equal. It is necessary on the contrary to think of the artist maintaining a relationship of gift and counter-gift in response to the gift that he received, the one that authorizes him to devote himself to art, and partaking as much as others in gift relations with fellow kindred.

Let us say it again differently. The notions of adonation and donation make it possible to break with sociologism, the reduction of human facts to social relations only, without needing to break with sociology or, more generally, with social science and philosophy. It is here that the proximity with the approach followed by the German sociologist-philosopher Hartmut Rosa in his book *Resonance* appears most clearly. Refusing to split the sociological and philosophical approaches allows us to reintegrate the question of the good life into sociology. When do we live well? When we are in, or enter into, resonance not only with others but also with the world, answers Rosa. This formulation is right and telling. What remains to be explained is what creates resonance or makes it possible. And this is where it seems to me that the paradigm of the gift takes over. As we explain in *Ceil pour œil, don pour don*. La psychologie revisitée, the condition of felicity (of resonance, if one prefers) in human relationships lies in the capacity to know how to ask as well as to give, to receive or to give in return. Not too much, not too little, and in a good way. This is what true and well-understood generosity consists of, which I propose to call “donativity 1”. But the recognition that arises between the partners in giving is only fully satisfying if it opens onto something else, by giving each one the feeling of participating in and of life itself. If it bears witness to one form or another of creativity, then I call it “donativity 2”. Donativity 2 puts us in relation with donation through one or more adonations.

As I suggested at the beginning of this introduction, the reason why some people approach the gift with so much distrust or difficulty, if the notion smells almost of sulphur or faggots, is because it almost inevitably refers to religion. The religion that is coming back so violently today, whereas we thought it was almost at the end of its life ten or twenty years ago, and that the social sciences have so much difficulty to think about. The religion which is par excellence the domain of the gift, the adonation and the donation in their most extreme and tightened conjugation. I try to show how by taking these notions in the right order, in their right articulation, the domain of the religious (of religion and religiosity) becomes thinkable. And, with it, that of its therapeutic effectiveness. For religion heals and cures – sometimes – as medicine or psychotherapies also try to do.

Another notion difficult to handle, undoubtedly because it maintains a more or less close relationship with both the gift and religion, is power.

This power, Mauss showed, goes to those who are in the position of a unilateral giver, who make gifts that the recipients are not able to return. In the same way, the divine entities evoked by the universalist religions, make gifts incommensurable to those that the humans could make in return. This is why they have power over them and why they subject humans to heteronomy. Thirsting for emancipation and autonomy, social science or philosophy reveal themselves in the end as uncomfortable in front of power as in front of the gift or religion. We don't really know what power consists of, but it represents for social science and philosophy only what we should denounce and from which we should free ourselves in order to finally reach autonomy. And the reaction is more or less the same when faced with authority and charisma. It is urgent, I believe, to get out of these denials and to situate these different notions in relation to each other, avoiding above all confusing power with domination, as is almost always the case. Here again, it seems to me that the extended gift paradigm allows us to move forward.

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RIASSUNTO

In questo saggio, Alain Caillé ricostruisce la “singolare storia del MAUSS (Movimento Anti-Utilitarista nelle Scienze Sociali)” da quando, all’inizio del 1980, un gruppo di amici provenienti da diverse discipline (sociologi, economisti, filosofi, ecc.) decise di fondare il “Bulletin du MAUSS” per contrastare la crescente egemonia dell'utilitarismo

e dell'economicismo nelle scienze umane e nelle stesse discipline filosofiche. Il Bulletin sarebbe diventato inizialmente “La Revue du MAUSS trimestrielle” dal 1988 al 1992 e dal 1993 al 2022 “La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle” fino alla sua attuale estensione anglofona “MAUSS International”. L'autore riprende la definizione di Marcel Mauss del dono come “fatto sociale totale” e spiega che il paradigma del dono è un “operatore di traduzione” nel senso che si arricchisce continuamente in interazione con i discorsi esistenti. L'operazione teorica che Caillé propone è quella di esplicitare la scoperta di Mauss passando da un paradigma del dono semplice, basato sulla prospettiva della semplice reciprocità tra chi dona e chi riceve, a un paradigma del dono allargato. In questo modo, può dialogare con altri paradigmi e altre correnti di pensiero (teoria del riconoscimento, teoria della cura, teoria dello sviluppo umano, ecc.) E da qui a una concezione del dono come “adonnement”, cioè l'impegno dei soggetti umani a portare nel mondo qualcosa di nuovo e inedito.

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