



# Caring for the Sick Person Through a Gift: A Socio-Anthropological Analysis

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**Abstract:** The issue of donation makes sense in a world where the capitalist logic is growing. The challenges of giving to people in need during the day dedicated to the sick was an opportunity for us to make an anthropological reading of caring for the sick through giving. Indeed, the sick person is vulnerable and requires a particular look. Their needs are biological, psychological, social and spiritual. Caring for them through gifts in kind and the gift of oneself (accompaniment, touching, listening, education and care) are dimensions of caring. However, this approach to the gift is not always shared by all, as it does not necessarily follow the logic of Marcel Mauss' theoretical model. The concept of donation, distorted by the individualist paradigm, is part of a system of giving-receiving-giving back or the theory of reciprocity oriented towards the understanding of social obligations, which has allowed us to understand the practices of donation in our modern societies and particularly in the outbursts of solidarity of donations to the sick organised by the School of Health Sciences each year. This article is an echo for health professionals to understand that making a donation to a sick person is taking care of the other (giving), in a situation of fragility, it is giving oneself to the other.

**Keywords:** Caring, Gift, Sick Person, Socioanthropological

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## 1. Introduction

The sick person is vulnerable and requires specific care. Giving a gift to these people does not fit into Mauss' paradigm of giving. Giving to the sick person is part of a logic of care. According to [1], taking care of the life of the domain, the life of the group of human life does not fit into the Maussian approach of giving, receiving and returning, but rather into an approach of accompanying the sick person who is in a singular space-time and who requires a particular look. The help given to them is part of a promotion of life. Florence Nightingale, through her action during the Crimean War, gave of herself to bring a smile to the war wounded. Only her presence and availability were voluntarily put to use to help the vulnerable. With a particular interest in Mauss's theory, some might ask if this theory is not outdated, is it worthwhile today? Is what has no market value still relevant in a world of changing profit motives? The theory of gift/gift offers a comfortable, and seemingly innovative, framework for thinking about this presentation, in that it is the antithesis of market exchange. It has become one of the most widely used and discussed

theories in anthropology, which has exercised and continues to exercise an undeniable fascination in other disciplines. We propose a theoretical framework to deepen the problematic of the gift to the sick oriented on the following six points, such as the logics of contemporary society, the conceptual approaches of the gift, the characteristics of the gift, the logics and heuristic ambivalences of the gift and the gift to the sick as a care, a caring gift

## 2. Logics of Contemporary Society

Contemporary society is marked by individualism and social fragmentation. These logics are contrary to that of Thomas Aquinas in the 18th century, considered the father of traditional morality [1]. According to the author, man's end is happiness, which consists in doing good (Ibid). From this perspective, as a human being in the likeness of God, man has the responsibility to make the choice of his actions. The search for the good from the Christian perspective is therefore fundamental. In contrast, Lock advocates liberal democracy, the essence of which is individualism. The concept of individualism is derived from individual (from the

Latin *individuus*), which is itself composed of the private suffix *in* and *dividuus*, meaning divisible, divided, shared, separate. Individualism can then be understood as a doctrine, theory or attitude that consists in privileging the interests, rights and values of the individual. It is a defining phenomenon of modern societies where human rights and freedoms are given priority. The essential utilitarian premise is the unbridled pursuit of self-interest. One of the influences of this paradigm is the undermining of the social bond, of social cohesion, which leads to social fragmentation. This consequence of individualism consists in the segmentation of society into isolated individuals. But Buisson [2] reminds us that 'we are a people and not a disordered gathering of selfish and unconnected individuals'.

Caillé will suggest a third paradigm of giving in order to go beyond the paradigms of utilitarianism and holism [3]. Moreover, Mauss' thought was to be shaped in the background of archaic forms of contract, where the system of economic benefit prevailed) [4]. Thus, Mauss is credited with the system of three 'obligations'; giving-receiving-giving back and the couple of reciprocity that follows: 'gift/counter-gift'.

The relevance of this theory lies in the fact that it offers avenues of reflection for analysing the situations of societies and social groups in the current situation. The logics of contemporary society can be summarised as individualistic and individualising logics.

### 3. Conceptual Approaches to the Gift

The gift is a polysemous concept. Based on its etymology, the word gift comes from the Latin "*donum*" which means "*gift, offering*". Donation comes from the Latin "*donare*" which means to make a gift, a donation, and "*dare*" which means to hand over, to grant, to concede, to bestow. There are almost as many definitions of the term gift as there are people who have tried to define the concept. The concept of gift is not unanimously accepted by anthropologists. In order to reconstruct the meaning of this concept, we will start from the common sense to the anthropological sense according to Mauss.

In the common sense of the gift, to give is to put in the possession or at the disposal of someone [5]. It is also the transfer of a good or a service to another person, which is distinguished from selling in that it is without consideration (Ibid). The gift is thus an act marked by freedom, it is voluntary and the recipient is free to refuse or accept [6].

Mauss's conceptual toolkit considers the gift as the condition for the production and reproduction of social relations and moves away from common sense. From this perspective, Mauss thus identifies eight approaches to the gift, namely: social bond, non-actualised social contract, cooperation, social and collective act, a transfer, a series of practices, and a system of giving-receiving-giving back.

#### 3.1. Giving as a Social Bond

The social bond, an essential concept in sociology,

designates according to Durkheim [7], a relationship without constraints. Indeed, it is about spaces of intersubjectivity that define a field of social interrelation built on the mode of exchanges and interaction has face to face, but also touches the basis of the relationship that singular individuals, not interchangeable, tie up.

As a social bond, the gift is the object of study of what circulates between humans. It is a result of the dynamics of the social bond, real or symbolic. The fact of having given engages the recipient and the donor in a relationship of reciprocity. A social relationship is created, an interrelation between the actors. The gift would then be characterised by reciprocity according to Mauss. From this perspective, Weber [8] shows us that the gift is an integral part of social systems. She believes that the gift is an 'obligatory transaction' [8] that engages the gratitude of the recipient. In the African context, one is indebted through giving, as giving implies a guarantee of receiving something back one day. In fact, the recipient is in a position to capitalise on his or her action, whereas the donor is in a position of moral debt. The gift here is not always in kind, it can be symbolic. This implies that the more one gives, the more one expects to receive and give back. These principles underpin the basic functioning of African societies and strengthen social ties. If giving creates a social bond, it can also be a form of social contract.

#### 3.2. Donation as an Unfulfilled Social Contract

A social contract is the reciprocity that characterises gift/gift is a form of implicit contract. Thus, for Weber [8], the gift makes it possible to highlight the universality and complexity of the gift/counter-gift mechanism. As such, it is part of the social and solidarity economy. This is contrary to the paradigm of individualism. Of course, these perspectives correspond to the peaceful conception of giving, the "*shared gift*" as opposed to the "*agonistic gift*" to use the distinction formulated by Caillé [9]. "*To refuse to take is to declare war; it is to refuse alliance and communion*" [10]. According to Marcel Mauss, giving as a social act implies that personal happiness depends on the happiness of others. A good done is a service rendered by someone who was free, just as well, not to render it (Ibid). To give is therefore to deprive oneself of the right to claim something in return. To deprive oneself of this right of return does not mean that there will be no return. But it does mean that the return will be free, that it is not included in the initial act of giving [10]. This freedom does not mean that the gift does not impose a condition of return. It is the gratuitousness of the gift that constrains the return.

#### 3.3. The Gift as a Cooperation

The gift is not an act of exchange of value since the recipient is not obliged to return the gift or its counterpart in value. The value of gifts is not directly relevant to this system of trade. According to Weber [11], there are three founding acts of giving:

- 1) the first founding act of the gift is the recognition of the alter ego;
- 2) the second act involves the acceptance of the gift, whereby the recipient recognises the value of the gift for his or her own use (unifying force of the yes)
- 3) the third act eliminates a difference in value between that accorded by the giver and that perceived by the receiver, which amounts to cancelling the material value of the exchange in order to emphasise the social value of the exchange.

What is interesting in the phenomenon of the gift according to Mauss, and relevant to our research object, is both its connection of two identities, those of the donator and the giver. The latter recognises both his identity through his acts of giving and that of the donator [12]. Moreover, he has the capacity to generate other acts of giving in the sense that the donator who responds perpetuates the chain of giving. A certain dynamic is created by the donation. Furthermore, the members of a society permanently maintain cooperative relationships based on a balance of giving and counter-giving. However, this balance does not ensure the absence of competition, selfishness, utilitarianism or betrayal.

**3.4. Giving as a Social, Collective and Reciprocal Act**

People exchange objects, services, goods and values. As soon as the recipient receives the gift, a force is established that circulates between the actors. People are therefore bound by mutual obligations. A system of provision and counter-provision is established, and our morals are forged, and our social life is structured and pacified. It is therefore the human rock on which our societies are built [13]. This phenomenon thus allows for the recognition of mutuals in today's societies. The term "mutual" should be understood as referring to all non-profit societies which organise solidarity between their members and whose funds come mainly from members' contributions. They are intended to be non-profit making and have had a primarily social role for decades. As a social act, a donation is a transfer of a good or service to another person, which differs from

It is an act marked by a strong sense of social responsibility. *"It is an act marked by freedom, i.e. it is voluntary and the recipient is free to accept or refuse it"* [6]. Inheritance (cultural, land...) in this case is like a privileged gift, because it is inherited from someone. Whoever accepts it incurs a form of debt, in return for the duty of assistance to parents who have become dependent. Furthermore, a series

of practices that include donations of assets, reconciliation payments (wedding gifts for the bride and groom, gifts for guests, as well as the payment of duties such as those on markets or the claiming of tithes) are all collective and reciprocal acts observed in society.

**3.5. Donation as a Give - Receive - Return System**

The Maussian system, like any system, is a set of interacting, interdependent elements. From this point of view, the Gift/Counter-Gift is linked to each other. To give, not to receive, not to return is to put an imbalance in the system. Giving/counter-giving includes an obligation to give back (or rather to give in turn) according to Mauss. Obviously, these perspectives correspond to the peaceful conception of the gift, to the 'shared gift', as opposed to the 'agonistic gift' to use the distinction formulated by Caillé [9]. Giving is thus the cement of society. *"if we give things and return them, it is because we give ourselves and return 'respects', but also because we give ourselves by giving, and if we give ourselves, it is because we 'owe' ourselves - ourselves and our property - to others"* [14].

Giving: this act has reasons that are linked to the rules of society, the motivations of the giver.

Receiving: this action creates a link materialised by the strength of the object exchanged. One has the impression of being animated by a magical hold on the giver, freedom to take or not to accept something. As soon as one has accepted something from someone, one has automatically accepted something of their spiritual existence, of their soul [14]. To refuse to receive is to break the social chain.

To give back: this action is like a situation of calling upon the force that creates upon reception. The link that is established only frees the donee after having returned at least the value of the gift to the donator. Not returning breaks the balance of the system.

Everything comes and goes as if there were a constant exchange in a spiritual way between things and people. If one gives things and returns them, it is because giving and returning respects, but also one gives oneself by giving and if one gives oneself, it is because one owes oneself and one's good to others.

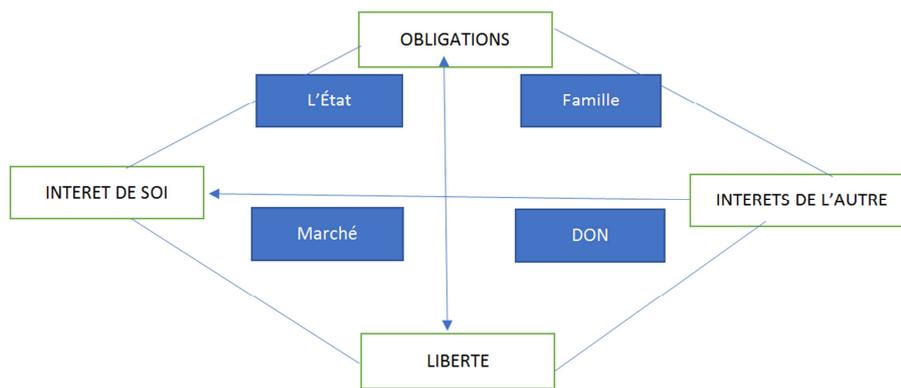
**4. Characteristics of Giving**

Modes of circulation of the gift according to Mauss  
There are three modes of circulation of the gift:

*Table 1. Mode of circulation of the gift.*

Market mode	State mode	Gift mode
is based on <i>Homo Sapience</i> (Adams Smith), translates the natural tendency to exchange.	Is based on <i>homo oequalis</i> , i.e. tendency linked to the equality of conditions between men (Tocqueville).	is based on <i>homo donator</i> . Natural tendency to give, to share
The basis of this exchange is an actualised contract characterised by the market dynamic which defines in advance the conditions of circulation of things and the sharing of dividends and responsibilities	The basis of this exchange is an actualised contract also characterised by the market dynamic. Except that the rights and duties of the actors are central. Respect for the legal aspects of the contract and the counterparty are essential.	The basis of this mode is a non-contracted gift (Stark, 1998) characterised by freedom. It is underpinned by the power to move things around between humans. To maintain the dynamics of the society whose stability could sclerotize it.

Market mode	State mode	Gift mode
<p>Emphasis is placed on the recipient (call him a customer) and on the quality of the object of exchange Here "the customer is king"</p> <p>Receiving is self-evident. Giving creates a debt that must be repaid, as it can humiliate the recipient.</p> <p>Competition and publicity underlie this mode of circulation of the gift.</p>	<p>The citizen is at the centre of the system and his rights are fundamental and must be respected.</p> <p>Receiving is self-evident, but the freedom to receive or not is set in motion here. The responsibility of the donor and the recipient is reciprocally engaged. Respect for the rights of each actor is the basis of this mode of circulation of the gift.</p>	<p>The social link that is forged between donors and recipients is crucial</p> <p>As a social bond, the donor implicitly denies himself the right to claim something in return. The condition of return is not sine qua non. What circulates is left to the ties that are formed between the actors.</p>
<p>The gift is centred on the object which can be depersonalised according to the identity of the recipient. The object becomes instrumentalised: <i>mechanical logic</i>.</p>	<p>The gift is focused on the rights of the person. The object exchanged can be depersonalised according to the identity of the recipient.</p>	<p>The gift is person-centred. The object exchanged possesses an energy materialised by a force that obliges to give back, to share. There is a virtue that forces the gift to circulate: existential logic.</p> <p>The object exchanged has an energy materialised by a force that obliges to give back, to share. There is a virtue that forces the gift to circulate: existential logic.</p>
<p>The relationship is asymmetrical, closed. The social bond links rationalism and instrumentalism. Debt is unilateral.</p>	<p>Relationship is asymmetrical, closed. The social bond links rationalism and instrumentalism.</p>	<p>The DRR system is open. There is a kind of unlimited relationship furnished with continuous obligations and reciprocity. The debt is mutual: obligations and freedom.</p>
<p>Le don est comme un mode de domination. Donner = une action rationnelle en finalité. Giving is like a mode of domination. Giving = a rational action in finality.</p>	<p>Le don est comme un mode de régulation des droits humains. Donner = action rationnelle en valeur. Giving is as a mode of regulation of human rights. Giving = rational action in value.</p>	<p>Giving = a way of manifesting our humaneness. The gift is above the object given. What obliges one to give is what giving obliges (Godelier, 1996). The reciprocity of the gift would guarantee its legal effectiveness, hence its contractual nature. But it would establish social relations, generating forms of power and links of solidarity.</p>



Source: Marcel Mauss (1923)

Figure 1. Gift matrix.

### 5. Functions and Values of the Gift

To better understand the functions of the gift, it is important to understand that it can be a material or immaterial object.

As a material object, it can be a material good, an organ, a gift, anonymous bequests paid by will, aid from charitable organisations, alms, offerings during religious ceremonies, grants, sponsorships, scholarships. In this case we can speak of gift-gift, gift-gratitude.

As immaterial objects, these are symbolic acts, such as rewards (work medals), solidarity operations (psychological assistance), talents (dispositions, aptitudes, abilities), sacrifices (blessings). In this case one can speak of a gift as a grace from God or a gift as a talent, recognition.

The sociologist Leveratto [15]. Demonstrates that the Maussian gift has three functions, namely

- 1) cementing the social link through interactions,

interpersonal relations and mutual aid. Giving thus allows social ties to be maintained. Giving-receiving-giving back weaves a link "from necessities to necessities" (Seneca, ) linked to humanity and resulting in an alternation of debt. From this point of view, giving builds a foundation of solidarity" (Ibid).

- 2) To guarantee good relations by maintaining the balance of the system, the social balance. In the Maussian gift there is a phenomenon of mutual recognition. It suggests a trust
- 3) It values the identity of the other, his otherness. To give is to recognise the other.

### 6. Logics of Giving

According to Alter [16], the values of giving are the values of sharing, solidarity, generosity and violence (negation of the other, subordination of the other).

The world is a mega-system that links individuals. This

interdependence is observed in the sensitive, invisible and symbolic links. Care is a generic activity that includes everything we do to maintain, perpetuate and repair our world by linking different elements (our bodies, ourselves, our environment) into a complex network, in support of life [17].

- 1) Existential logic: Man is by essence *Homo donator*, relational. He cannot therefore evolve without interactions. And in an interaction there is an encounter, sharing, exchange, and gift of at least experiences. Once face to face, man gives himself to the other naturally in a dynamic relationship. He shares the same space, the same time.
- 2) Logic of solidarity: the DRR system is a whole where the parts are interdependent. The individuals who make up the society are therefore in solidarity, linked by the transmission of a social bond. Giving is part of a social relationship, a social act that enables society to function. This signified (solidarity) correlated with the signifier (social bond) makes society function. "*Giving is the stage on which the freest social bond is played out*" [18]. Both the donor and the recipient are bound by this system of generosity and counter-generosity (Ibid).
- 3) Symbolic logic: the link that is at the centre of the Maussian gift is superior to the object exchanged. Indeed, the value of the link escapes the monetary object and is more identified with time) [19]. The gift reminds us that we are not objects, as underlined by "men who give confirm to each other that they are not things". The value of the link is symbolic and is attached to the object that circulates as a gift.

## 7. Heuristic Ambivalences of the Gift

The Maussian gift binds the actors in an ambivalent relationship. Based on reciprocity, a primary sociability value, it is open and generates a debt, a commitment. Receiving may humiliate the recipient, as it is not self-evident. The recipient experiences a positive or negative debt.

Mauss's obligation to return translated by a force that is in the given object.

- 1) Intimacy and rivalry: invitation to be polite and politeness must be returned. Translates into a system of service and counter-service that our morality has forged, that our social life has been able to structure and pacify
- 2) Freedom/Constraint: because in the DRR cycle, there is no guarantee of receiving or returning. These actions are both voluntary and compulsory, because to refuse them is to leave the system. The recipient is under the spotlight, as the process is continuous, never limited to the individual. He or she must give back to avoid becoming a subjugated subject
- 3) Interest and disinterest: the donor puts the donee in a situation of inferiority. This form of subordination, or negation of the other, inhibits the values of sharing, solidarity and generosity of giving. Giving is indebtedness and sharing.

- 4) Market and non-market: because it conceals the logic of gift and exchange. The circulatory model of Maussian giving creates a state of mutual indebtedness (reciprocity, obligation, agonistic giving, social link)
- 5) The strength of the thing given comes from the fact that the object of the gift embodies a certain strength that obliges circularity, and thus binds people in their mutual obligation, and allows conflicts to be mitigated. Contemporary societies that advocate a cold and calculating mentality, individual interest, are moving away from the principles of exchange. The spiral of giving is not necessarily pacifying, as it can become hellish, to the point of destruction of the objects exchanged. The gift presents false alternatives, in short a paradoxical face, because it seems to unite opposite entities (the agnostic gift)

## 8. Taking Care, a Gift of Care

Taking care means accompanying the other in his or her fragility. To accompany is to open up and to open up to the other, to give oneself, to make a gift of oneself. Hospitality appears as a social relationship where receiving is giving hospitality, being receptive, it is the first step towards otherness, the first degree of commitment. Hospitality is a pivotal moment in the typology of giving, and not a simple give-and-take switch. This sacred duty towards the other is an act of humanity. Hospitality is a social fact according to Mauss, for whom the constitution of the person is indispensable to the gift and to exchanges and benefits. Hospitality is a gift of space to be inhabited, crossed or understood [12]. From this point of view, *giving care and making a gift are two concepts that are 'adequate to describe certain practices and relationships and have a real, lyric value and quality'* [20]. Care refers to '*a generic activity that includes everything we do to maintain, perpetuate and repair our world, linking different elements (our bodies, ourselves, our environment) in a complex network, in support of life'* [21]. Both life and health cannot be bought. As mentioned above, there are many ways in which the gift can be circulated. Thus, it is not always possible to exchange in monetary terms. Taking care or giving care to the sick is a way of giving-receiving-giving back. Indeed, one gives the self by taking care of the patient. The latter receives the care, a gift that he or she returns with a smile, recognition, gratitude or even friendship. Hospitality (hospital) refers to a free activity based on giving. The nursing activity is thus strewn with Maussian vocabulary: "*the care process is indeed a recognition of the other*" [22]. "Isn't it said that the way of giving is better than what is given" (Ibid: 68). A reading of the nursing gift through the prism of Mauss' theory reveals some characteristics. In the DRR system, giving back is not an absolute obligation, as the bond that circulates is mutual. Caring for the other creates a sensitive, invisible, symbolic bond that generates a visible force in the sharing of vulnerability (empathy). The carer and the cared for (giver and receiver) are situated in a system where

interactions are permanent. The link that constantly circulates in this system is the relationship of trust, solicitude, alliance. The gift of care conceals the logic of sharing the human condition, sharing vulnerability. This condition, which stems from our humanity, positions us permanently as debtor and creditor or, according to Mauss, in the system of giving-receiving-giving back. It is in this sense that Chaniel speaks of the self that makes and breaks. The caregiver weaves a battery of relations and relational processes that play an essential role in the caregiver-patient relationship. Similarly, this face-to-face relationship can also expose the caregiver to the threat of violence due to the encounter. It is for this reason that Chaniel states that "the vulnerability of others can just as easily elicit the act of caring as the act of aggression, of predation to kill" [23]. In short, the gift of care is a Maussian gift that can undergo a semantic shift into grace-gratuity or grace-obligation [23]. It is a commitment, a gift of our love in the sense of Caillé: 'the gift is any service provided without guarantee of return with a view to nourishing the social bond in which goods are not worth their utility (use value) or their price (exchange value), but because they create or nourish the interpersonal relationship (bond value)' [24].

The gift of care is a gift of self in that the latter abandons himself to the other, he gives himself to the other. It is a gift of time. The carer offers a part of himself to the sick person. From this angle, the identity dimension of the gift is addressed [25]. Concerning the relationship between the carer and the cared for, 'the identity is built along a pathway enamelled with debts and abandonments: the being is played out, won and sometimes lost in the face-to-face encounter... Weakened, traumatised by illness or the vagaries of fate, patients (and even carers) rediscover their identity in the mirror of the other' [26]. From this perspective, the gift of care, or gift of self, integrates mutual recognition based on trust. The gift of care is part of a continuum in which the carer takes his or her place in his or her fragility by occupying in turn the place of donor and recipient.

## 9. Conclusion

The gift is an essential object of anthropology. It has been the subject of several anthropological analyses. In the capitalist paradigm, this concept deserves a specific look. The conceptual approach to the gift is complex. According to Mauss, the gift covers several semantic aspects, namely: social link, non-actualised social contract, gift as cooperation, gift as a social, collective act, gift as a series of practices, gift as a system: Give - Receive - Give back. The modes of circulation of the Gift are of three kinds: market, state and gift. For Mauss, it is a question of thinking of the gift as a form of human reality which obliges the actors to engage in a link of reciprocity freed from any utilitarian calculation. Taking care of the patient is a nursing gift that is part of the Maussian gift. The carer makes a gift of himself, a gift of time in that he abandons himself to the other, he gives himself to the other. This theory of Mauss is a whole that

circulates the social link between human beings by integrating the paradigm of reciprocity in order to exist.

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