

# Chapter 3

## A Genealogy of the Gift

Germán Scalzo

**Abstract** This chapter takes a look at the gift, in which academic interest has recently grown, especially after the release of Benedict XVI's social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. It outlines a genealogy of the gift, briefly presenting the three main stages of its evolution: (1) the ceremonial gift, typical of the ancient world and found in the cultural anthropological approach that the French tradition later adopted (Mauss, Caillé, Hénaff, etc.); (2) the moral gift, which Aristotle first outlined to explain the emergence of the city; and (3) the personal gift, developed in the Middle Ages thanks to Christian Revelation and its corresponding idea of the person.

**Keywords** Gift • Economics • Mauss • Aristotle • Caritas in Veritate

### 3.1 Introduction

Academic interest in the gift markedly increased after the 2009 publication of *Caritas in Veritate*, an encyclical whose wealth overflows any attempt to summarize it (Rubio de Urquía et al. 2014) and that is presented as a continuation of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (CiV, 8, 10–20). Against the progressive reductionism that modern rationality has undergone, Benedict XVI argues that the “broadening [of] our concept of reason and its application” is indispensable if we are to succeed in adequately weighing all the elements involved in the question of development and in the solution of socio-economic problems” (CiV, 31). While he certainly clarifies that he does not intend to provide clear technical solutions or to get tied up in state politics, he offers some guidelines for social life that come from “*fidelity to the truth*, which alone is the *guarantee of freedom* and of *the possibility of integral human development*” (CiV, 9) under the premise that “both the market and politics need individuals who are open to reciprocal gift” (CiV, 39).

---

G. Scalzo (✉)  
Business Ethics, Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City, Mexico  
e-mail: [gscalzo@up.edu.mx](mailto:gscalzo@up.edu.mx)

© Springer International Publishing AG 2017  
J.D. Rendtorff (ed.), *Perspectives on Philosophy of Management and Business Ethics*, Ethical Economy. Studies in Economic Ethics and Philosophy 51,  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-46973-7\_3

31

Indeed, the gift is the encyclical's main theme:

*Charity in truth* places man before the astonishing experience of gift. Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms, which often go unrecognized because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life. The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension (CIV, 34).

A proper understanding of the logic of gift is essential for attaining full human development. However, this understanding is not simple because it involves a very deep anthropological conception that, in addition, has evolved over time. In what follows, this chapter presents the essential elements of this evolution, analyzing its three main stages, including the ceremonial gift, the moral gift, and the personal gift.

### 3.2 The Ceremonial Gift

To understand the meaning of the economy, it is best to start from the differences that can be observed between animal and human life. While all animal species conform to certain rules for breeding and feeding, leaving no room for reflection or knowledge, in the case of human beings, this process is not necessarily fixed, but rather depends on culture and history. Moreover, these rules are not intended for the mere survival of the species, but rather aim to achieve the best way of life.

Human beings, therefore, do not live in the wild in the same way that other living beings do; rather, humans inhabit their own world, to which the spirit gives unity and meaning and in which the symbolic dimension of speech and discourse prevails within a community. In fact, man can only live in community, the most basic of which is the family, which is where the idea of economics acquires its meaning (etymologically *oikos-nomos* means household management)<sup>1</sup> as the acquisition and administration of the means for a good life. Ethnographic studies and cultural anthropology that Mauss led in early last century revealed the evolution of the human bond between families and the resulting social structure.

The gift appears as something universal (Mauss analyzed its presence in Northwest America, Melanesia, Polynesia, Samoa Islands, Trobriand, etc., as well as in Scandinavian, Celtic, Roman, Germanic and Indian societies.) It has been present in all human communities, especially in ancient societies. The work of Marcel Mauss, who was Durkheim's nephew, is found halfway between sociology and cultural anthropology and was fundamental in reviving the topic in the mid twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In his seminal work *Essai sur le don* (English translation: *The Gift. Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*), Mauss claims that gift,

---

<sup>1</sup>This point goes beyond the scope of this article. For an idea of economics in the ancient world, see: Scalzo (2014).

<sup>2</sup>Cfr. Mauss (2009). Although the original version is from 1924, Lévi-Strauss was responsible for its dissemination, having popularized Mauss's work after his death in 1950. Currently, the *Revue du Mauss*, edited by the *Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales (M.A.U.S.S.)* (<http://www.revuedumauss.com>), shows the evolution of leading intellectuals works on this matter.

freedom, liberality and interest in giving, are back, reappearing as a key reason after being long forgotten. (2009, p. 234).

In *The enigma of the gift*, Maurice Godelier critically dialogues with Mauss to conclude that “the gift has objectively become a matter primarily subjective, personal and individual. Is the expression and the instrument of personal relationships that are beyond the market and the state,” (1998, p. 295) which eventually became known as the third paradigm: “today, given the scale of social problems, and the apparent inability of the market and the State to solve them, gift is becoming again a socially necessary objective condition for the reproduction of society” (1998, p. 295).

On the initiative of Alain Caillé—one of the main authors in gift studies today—the group *Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales* (MAUSS) was founded in Paris and its acronym makes an honorific reference to Mauss. This group has contributed to the fact that the French have taken the lead on the interpretation of the gift. Caillé is a great admirer of Mauss, who “showed that ritually codified, generous reciprocity constituted the dominant fact in relationships between groups in traditional societies and formed the very cement of the social bond” (2010, p. 107). The highlights of Caillé’s work include the *Anthropology of the gift*<sup>3</sup> and his collaboration in Jacques Godbout’s work, *The Spirit of the Gift* (2000), a book that has become necessary to understand this movement, and in the French tradition in general.<sup>4</sup> Caillé is especially responsible for the consideration of social relations from the logic of the gift as a “third paradigm,” a multidimensional theory of action beyond the individualism proper to the market and holism of the state (2010, p. 14–21).<sup>5</sup> “The paradigm of the gift makes donation the first constitutive moment of human reality, the moment at which personal identity and social bonds are founded because of that donation” (Moreno 2010, p. 7). In short,

with different perspectives and diverse methods, it can certainly be said that many current interests in the humanities and social sciences are showing that the concept of gift, an ancient notion, whether rehabilitated or proposed anew, is an especially privileged key to understanding the person and human nature, as well as contemporary social and economic problems (González, 2013, p. 15).

In general terms, in the ancient world there are three big stages in human groups that express progressively greater ownership of the natural habitat: the first was dedicated to hunting and gathering, while the next was structured by grazing or an incipient kind of agriculture, and finally, the emergence of crafts and trade. In the first two stages, human bonds were founded on the practice of the ceremonial gift, regulated by vindictive justice. In the third phase, in which cities were consolidated, human bonds were based on political authority, regulated by arbitral justice.

<sup>3</sup>Original version: *Anthropologie du don. Le tiers paradigme*, Desclée, Paris, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>See also Godbout, J. (2000).

<sup>5</sup>Holism points to the fact that the totality of the social sphere, which preexists individuals and their actions, explains by default everything that makes up the individual parts of society. From the scientific point of view, it has taken the form of functionalism, culturalism, structuralism, etc. see: González (2013), p. 16.

In the practice of the ceremonial gift, the bond of blood and honor or status of each person within the clan or tribe prevailed. Exchanges were conducted in order to establish and maintain partnerships between parental groups through their representatives; the delivery and receipt of the gift—whether things or people—expressed mutual recognition. The ultimate expression of an alliance between different groups was marriage, i.e., the delivery and reception of wives, which shows that the gift did not correspond to the delivery and reception of something neutral, but rather was a “pledge,” something that was of utmost importance to the parties involved.<sup>6</sup> A pledge is an object that is delivered as sign of fulfillment of an obligation towards someone, while it expresses what is most valuable and intrinsic to the subject that gives; it is the gift of self in he who gives. The goods exchanged according to this logic are priceless assets; they focus on the relationship and constitute “the development of a powerful network of interpersonal bonds” (Hénaff 2010, p. 107).

Hénaff studied the evolution of the gift in *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money and Philosophy*, based on Mauss’s studies of ceremonial gift in ancient societies and he showed how, over time, it acquired some verticality with the practice of offering to the gods, which he called *ritual gift*.<sup>7</sup> He first used the case of the Maori tribe to show that giving assumes the obligation to respond: “After giving something of himself, he must receive something of the other,” (2010, p. 125) but especially, that one *gives himself* in that which he gives: “The implication of the giver in the thing given is not a metaphor: it involves a transfer of soul and substantial presence” (Ibid, p. 127).

The practice of the ceremonial gift was a way of ensuring the recognition of stable and public alliances between groups of families and its name derives from the fact that this gift was carried out according to very detailed ceremonial rules. It is “total social fact” because it creates a bond that holds people together.<sup>8</sup> The justice that corresponds to these societies is vindictive justice,<sup>9</sup> intended to restore, in the case of an offense, the order established by the ceremonial practice of gift-exchange.

---

<sup>6</sup>The exchange of useful goods developed in parallel, but it was not of great importance since these groups’ subsistence economies were, in principle, self-sufficient.

<sup>7</sup>The idea of sacrifice, although it is important in the history of the gift, exceeds the scope of this article. See, for example, Hénaff (2010), p. 156–202. As well as: Llano (2004).

<sup>8</sup>Hénaff gives an example with by *hau and taonga*. The spiritual *hau* always has to return to its origin, the motivation to give, while the giver, *taonga*, is omnipotent. He also gives an example with a kind of exchange called *kula*, which involves a 3-month journey by ship where one tribe goes to visit another resulting in a competitive exhibition and then exchange of precious goods called *waygu’a* takes place: precious necklaces (*soulava*) that are viewed as masculine, worn by women and move East to West are traded for bracelets (*mwali*) that are viewed as feminine, worn by men and move West to East. According to the trobriandés myth, *mwali* and *soulava* tend toward each other, as man tends toward woman. Exchange is a festive ceremony in which the giver is not seen as losing, but rather gaining. Moreover, he who gives more than he receives is superior. These differences in rank founded the social order. Denying the gift (not accepting it) was tantamount to spurning an invitation to alliance, which was equivalent to declaring war. The other example he uses is *potlatch*, one chief’s celebration to honor another that he considered a rival, which augmented the rivalry because the more ostentatious one celebration, the more ostentatious the reciprocal recognition had to be. See Hénaff (2010), p. 116–138.

<sup>9</sup>The typical example of this kind of justice is “an eye for an eye.”

### 3.3 The Moral Gift

In his gift genealogy, Hénaff makes it clear that the ceremonial gift is social, not moral (2010, p. 109–125). The emergence of cities represented an important step in the evolution of human relationships and the structure of social organization. Mutual recognition, which had previously been established horizontally through partnerships between families, was replaced by a central authority's establishment of law, i.e., the emergence of political authority. This signified a shift from vindictive justice to arbitral justice. As part of vindictive justice, the fundamental mode of justice was revenge: "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth." However, in an arbitration system, authority acts as a mediator that "administers the debt" of the community, which it evaluates and sanctions. However, "the difference between vindictive justice and arbitral justice is not reduced to an opposition between violence and lawlessness on one side and rule of law and reasonable mediation on the other" (Hénaff 2010, p. 297). The key is not the relationship to justice, but rather the relationship to debt: in the case of the gift, there is a debt to pay back; in the latter, an exchange price is determined, resulting in parity between symbolic and financial debt (Ibid, p. 283–298).

Aristotle was the first to perceive the passage from personal reciprocity proper to vindictive justice to the proportional reciprocity of arbitral or political justice. While for the ceremonial gift, the gift's symbolic value or pledge received from a group matters over the utility of things, the new configuration of the gift focuses on utility, such that exchange moves to center stage.

Aristotle devoted Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to justice. He distinguished universal justice from particular justice, and within the latter he parced the difference between distributive justice—equality according to a geometric proportion—and corrective justice—equality according to an arithmetic proportion.<sup>10</sup> Immediately afterwards, in the fifth chapter, and in the context of corrective justice, he addressed the issue of justice in exchanges—voluntary transactions—as a form of reciprocity; "in associations for exchange this sort of justice does hold men together—reciprocity in accordance with a proportion and not on the basis of equality" (NE 1132b). The aim of this kind of justice is to correct the gains and losses that occur in exchanges to maintain proportional reciprocity, which is proper to the city.

In *Politics I*, Aristotle discusses the genesis of exchange and he distinguishes different forms: bartering—or exchange without the intermediation of currency—, the use of money as a means to acquire something that is needed, buying and selling to make money, and lending money at interest, which is known as usury. Aristotle examines the evolution of relationships of exchange over time, while exploring the nature of exchange value and its effects on human behavior. In relation to the respective ends (*telos*) of these forms of exchange, he concludes that there are two differ-

---

<sup>10</sup>"Distributive justice is based on man's 'natural' inequality, while corrective justice is concerned with the equality of man, which is instituted by 'convention.'" Soudek (1952), p. 47.

ent types: one that is natural to the good life in community and another that is contrary to it.

The key to understanding the difference is made clear in his *Ethics* and is related to currency and the distinction between the use of goods to satisfy a need and the possibility of exchanging it.<sup>11</sup> *Chrematistic* is a part of the economy that deals with the acquisition of property necessary for the good life, that is, its purpose is provision, pointing to consumption or use. Indeed, Aristotle distinguishes between natural *chrematistic*, which pursues things that are useful because of the value proper to them in their use, and bad *chrematistic*, which is unnatural because it is guided by exchange value, i.e., by the desire for money (Pol. 1258b). The exchange value quantifies things, gives them a logical category that differs from their inherent nature, i.e., their use value. This logical distinction, which shows the two major purposes that arise according to which one takes precedence, is sufficient for analyzing exchange.

When the use value takes precedence the end is limited because “the elements of true riches; for the amount of property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited” (Pol. 1256b). On the other hand, corrupt chrematistics “is thought to be concerned with coin; for coin is the unit of exchange and the limit of it. And there is no bound to the riches which spring from this art of wealth-getting” (Pol. 1256b). When the exchange value takes precedence, the search for profit is endless, as shown in the following poem Aristotle took from Solon: “No bound to riches has been fixed for man” (Pol. 1256b). As Meikle points out “the underlying thought at this point is that, since it is a quantity, exchange value (and its bodily form of money) has no inherent limit” (1995, p. 50).

Exchange has “arised at first from what is natural, from the circumstance that some have too little, others too much” (Pol. 1257b). Aristotle presents the necessity of exchange and its first form, i.e., the direct non-monetary exchange of one commodity against other –barter–, as a natural process.

In the first community, indeed, which is the family, this art is obviously of no use, but it begins to be useful when the society increases. For the members of the family originally had all things in common; later, when the family divided into parts, the parts shared in many things, and different parts in different things, which they had to give in exchange for what they wanted (...) This sort of barter is not part of the wealth-getting art and is not contrary to nature, but is needed for the satisfaction of men’s natural wants (Pol. 1257a).

The exchange of goods without the intermediation of money can be represented by C-C’ (commodities).<sup>12</sup> Aristotle immediately adds that “this sort of barter is not part of the wealth-getting art and is not contrary to nature, but is needed for the

---

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle’s sharp distinction between exchange value and use value may lead to a certain ambivalence on this point since the exchange value of a good does not correspond to its proper and peculiar use. However, Aristotle fails to say that the use of an object in exchange is “unnatural” (*para phusin*), precisely because using an object in a way other than its proper and peculiar use does not mean that this use is bad.

<sup>12</sup> It was Marx who first used the letters C and M (commodities and money) to represent the circuits by which Aristotle describes the various exchange forms. See *Capital*, I, 3 y II, 4.

satisfaction of men's natural wants, and it was natural to complete self-sufficiency" (Pol. 1257a). However, the other form of exchange grew out of this one, "when the inhabitants of one country became more dependent on those of another, and they imported what they needed, and exported what they had too much of, money necessarily come into use" (1257a).

This other type that he discusses is an evolution of the first, a consequence of the mediation of money, the response to which is known as the problem of commensurability: how to determine how much of a good to exchange for another according to justice, which calls for a pattern of measurement:

All goods must therefore be measured by some one thing, as we said before. Now this unit is in truth demand, which holds all things together (...); but money has become by convention a sort of representative of demand; and this is why it has the name money (*nômisma*)—because it exists not by nature but by law (*nômos*) (NE 1133b).

A good is sold (C-M) and with the money gained, another is purchased (M-C'). This form is represented as C-M-C' and as long as one sells to buy, money is a means for obtaining a good that one wants to consume.

Aristotle is lenient with the C-M-C' form because its purpose is consumption, however, when buying (M-C) to sell to a larger amount (C-M'), i.e., when the M-C-M' circuit is generated, then currency is sought after as an end in itself and one's profit means someone else's loss, which is an affront to justice. The problem is that, in reality, both types (C-M-C' and M-C-M') overlap, and "the source of the confusion is the near connection between the two kinds of wealth-getting; in both, the instrument is the same, although the use is different, and so they pass into one another; for each is a use of the same property, but with a difference: accumulation is the end in the one case, but there is a further end in the other (...) to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it" (Pol. 1257b). It is key to distinguish between the two ends, because, "though they appear to be different ways of doing the same thing, they are really similar ways of doing different things" (Meikle 1995, p. 88). With C-M-C' satisfaction of needs prevails, while with M-C-M' profit constitutes the end. To illustrate this idea, Aristotle uses the example of the "Delphian knife," (Pol. 1252b) a crude, cheap tool that had various uses, none of which dominated. In its design, instead of use, exchange prevailed and therefore many things could be done with it, but it was not really good for anything.

The difference between C and C' in the first case is qualitative (they are not commensurable); they refer to things with different uses. However, the difference between M and M' is quantitative; M' must necessarily be a larger amount given that this is the only difference that can exist between two sums of money since currency is commensurate. Now if M can become M', nothing prevents it from becoming M'' and so on without recognizing any limits: "in this art of wealth-getting there is no limit of the end, which is riches of the spurious kind" (Pol. 1257b).

The fourth form of exchange is between money without the mediation of any good, i.e., M-M', which is known as usury. "The most hated sort, and with the greatest reason, is usury, which makes a gain out of money itself, and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at

interest (...) of all modes of getting wealth this is the most unnatural” (Pol. 1258b). For Athenians, moneylending was a sign of friendship whose end was to help cement bonds of *philia* for the stability of the polis (Millet 1991; Meikle 1995, p. 65).

Indeed, justice in exchange is fundamental in Aristotle’s analysis because, as Ritchie points out, it provides a form of *philia* in an activity (commerce) that could threaten the unity of the polis (1984, p. 185). Aristotle was aware of how important exchange is for the unity and development of a community. Therefore, before analyzing proportionality, he mentions the *spirit of gratitude* (*kharis*):

This is why they give a prominent place to the *temple of Graces* –to promote the requital of services; for this is characteristic of grace– we should serve in return one who has shown grace to us, and should another time take the initiative in showing it (NE 1133a).

According to Aristotle,

proportionate return is secured by cross-conjunction. Let A be a builder, B a shoemaker, C a house, D a shoe. The builder, then, must get from the shoemaker the latter’s work, and must himself give him in return his own. If, then, first there is proportionate equality of goods, and then reciprocal action takes place, the result we mention will be affected (NE 1133a).

This section has been interpreted to serve as the basis for numerous attempts to build a mathematical theory of just exchange. However, too much attention has been paid to the formula and its possible mathematical implications. Why, when referring to ratios, does Aristotle introduce producers when talking about justice in such relationships (*to dikaion*)? There is great debate and confusion on this point among commentators, who agree that it is one of the most ambiguous developments in Aristotle’s contribution to economic thought (Finley 1970, p. 8; Meikle 1995, p. 132). *To dikaion* involves four terms: two people and two goods. Justice is found in the correct proportion (*analogia*) between these four, which is the “equality of ratios” (between persons A:B and between things C:D). What Aristotle is doing here is nothing more and nothing less than maintaining a reference to the logic of gift, which always originates in people.

The French tradition discussed above defines the gift as “any provision of goods and services without obligation, guarantee or certainty of return, undertaken with the intent to create, maintain or regenerate a social relationship” (Caillé 2000, p. 124). Within the exchange that takes place in the political community, we see a breakthrough in “commercial” terms, where the exchange of goods is somewhat removed from the parties involved. However, the gift is not eradicated, but rather acquires a different hue. Here, the parties are considered equal— commutative justice—but the gift is still *related to things*.

Aristotle insisted that politics was based on the realm of the gift, which is why the Temple of Graces acted as a reminder of the obligation to give and receive in terms of mutual service, *kharis*, and *philia*, without which the city would be inconceivable:

Several conditions are requisite if there is to be a genuine *koinonia*: (1) the members must be free men; (2) they must have a common purpose, major or minor, temporary or of long duration; (3) they must have something in common, share something, such as place, goods, cult, meals, desire for a good life, burdens, suffering; (4) there must be *philia* (conventionally but inadequately translated “friendship”), mutually in other words, and to *dikaion*, which for simplicity we may reduce to “fairness” in their mutual relations (Finley 1970, p. 8).

The gift then takes on a new perspective: “it had become a virtue and that it was no longer a gesture of reciprocal recognition but had become a gesture of mutual assistance” (Hénaff 2010, p. 251). In his genealogy of the gift, Hénaff equates the moral gift to the Greek idea of *kharis*, i.e., “an entire model of gift-giving as favor developed around the Greek notion of *kharis*” (2010, p. 246). This is so important because this paradigm contains the essence of subsequent economic thought.

### 3.4 The Personal Gift

With the notion of person introduced by Christianity,<sup>13</sup> the idea of the gift takes on a different hue, which does not depart from earlier traditions, but that rather renews them, giving them a more solid foundation. The revelation of the mysteries of the Creation and Incarnation not only introduce radical innovations in the way of understanding the relationship between God and men, but also between men themselves. St. Thomas and his teacher, St. Albert the Great, are the most recognized representatives of medieval thought and they were the first to consider that the gift had ontological significance (Martínez Echevarría 1983, p. 15–18), i.e., that gift meant ontological Being.

St. Thomas Aquinas found an excellent basis for better understanding the Christian message in Aristotle’s work. In fact, his treatment of economics is merely a commentary on Aristotle’s vision with an added supernatural perspective (S. Th, II, II). Aquinas added the call that all men have to human perfection through civic friendship to Aristotle’s political scheme, as well as man’s call to full perfection—holiness— with the help of grace.

All living beings tend toward an end. They have a substantial form or internal, constitutive principle of unity. Unlike machines, living things are open, autopoietic agents that interact with the environment according to their nature. Man is a living being in the highest degree and tends toward the maximum fullness of being. The person is not exhausted with the completion of a form proper to his own nature, but

---

<sup>13</sup>Without the notion of creation, the idea of the person is unattainable because radical contingency and the distinction between being and nothingness go along with it and, therefore, essence and existence cannot be distinguished. For a metaphysics of the person see: González (2006), Polo (1999) and Haya (1997).

rather has a supernatural end that transcends his own nature.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, determination towards that end is free— he can come closer to or back away from it, or what is the same, improve or degrade himself.

Action is a manifestation of what he is and, in the case of a free and rational being, he is a moral, accountable, and responsive actor. Man's act of being allows him to know and love and he is therefore higher than other living beings. The person has intimacy and is neither identified with his essence nor his actions; he is always beyond immediacy, he can look at himself from a distance and he experiences time. The person can always be more and go beyond the merely necessary. Man can freely destine himself to realize his unique way of being, which he will only come to know if he finds the right way and which he has received as a gift. The person starts with a received life that gives rise to a realized life since growth and contribution thereto are personal.

People are created as unique and unrepeatable, analog participations in God's uncreated love, beings who can freely give themselves to God through the rest of the creatures, but especially through other men. The grace of the beatific vision would be meaningless if man did not possess a natural desire to see God. In short, for Aquinas, ethics is how nature and grace are articulated so that man can reach his ultimate end.<sup>15</sup>

With a free response to grace— a divine gift— man can turn his service to the city into love for God and men since, as St. Augustine had already showed, men belong to two cities, both earthly and heavenly (*Civitas Dei*), which do not oppose each other, but rather the former is the path to the other. Here we can anticipate a conclusion: the radical novelty of Christianity with respect to the gift is found in considering that man, created in the image and likeness of God, can only be deeply understood as a gift (Sellés 2007, p. 618).<sup>16</sup> According to Polo, the creature is "achieved reality. The achievement is as radical as reality. But this means that the creature is not assumed: it is created out of nothing" (1996, p. 114).

Understanding man as a person implies recognizing that he is essentially *a someone* open to relationships. The end of man is common; he cannot achieve it alone. St. Thomas also recognizes that it is in the nature of man to live in community. Knowledge and human love should be shared, reciprocated, and objectified in their manifestation. Communication is intrinsic to man, who, through language and work, carries out an expansion of his corporeality, through which he can personalize himself even more. There are natural relationships between people— kinship, fraternity, parentage— that are manifested in giving and receiving. The manifestation of that existential community is the essential community, i.e., society, which

---

<sup>14</sup>For other created beings, fulfilling that which they tend toward is necessary and completely determined by their nature. Their end is, therefore, a finite external consummation from an instinctive and unthinking tendency.

<sup>15</sup>Grace is necessary as a consequence of original sin. Before the fall, man knew that he should love God, his origin and the end towards which he tends, all of which freely united him to God.

<sup>16</sup>See also p. 95–105 y 596–597.

naturally arises because, through mutual help, people achieve their own perfection; through the care of others, people find a remedy for mutual needs, compassion and sympathy, gifts and exchanges, and other manifestations of the human need to love and be loved.<sup>17</sup> The social end is the common good, which aims to achieve the necessary conditions for men and families to reach their highest development, conditions that are usually summarized into three areas: peace, material well-being and values. Peace must be internal and external, individual and social, the result of a voluntary and spontaneous, rather than imposed, acceptance.

Following the classical tradition of viewing society as a natural unit of order, Aquinas does not exclude the gift from the field of justice,<sup>18</sup> although he relates it to liberality (justice gives the other what is his, while the posture of the gift gives what is one's own) and integrates it, therefore, in a paradigm of love and gratitude: "The word 'gift' imports an aptitude for being given. And what is given has an aptitude or relation both to the giver and to that to which it is given. For it would not be given by anyone, unless it was his to give; and it is given to someone to be his" (S. Th., I, q.38 a.1). Thus, besides commutative and distributive justice, a way towards *transcendental justice* is opened up. In establishing justice within the order God imposed on the world, it acquires a transcendent and personal basis: eternal or *divine law*. This law is closer to man than himself; it is a knowledge of the truth that gives full meaning to his freedom and that is at the heart of all the saints, that is, it is revealed to man when he reaches the beatific vision of God.

Under the basic premise that "love is superior to the good," (Sellés 2007, p. 596) St. Thomas highlights two points that were present throughout classical philosophy on the gift: gratuity and love. As Aquinas notes,

In proof of this we must know that a gift is properly an unreturnable giving, as Aristotle says (Topic. iv, 4)—i.e. a thing which is not given with the intention of a return—and it thus contains the idea of a gratuitous donation. Now, the reason of donation being gratuitous is love; since therefore do we give something to anyone gratuitously forasmuch as we wish him well. So what we first give him is the love whereby we wish him well. Hence it is manifest that love has the nature of a first gift, through which all free gifts are given (S. Th., I, q.38, a. 2),

In *Tener y dar*, Polo (1996) claims that man is not only defined as being able to have, but especially as a being capable of giving, whose contributions come from his intimacy, which characterizes the person. That the gift is free means that it is not mechanically caused, but rather that it is a novelty:

---

<sup>17</sup>As we saw, for Mauss, the gift system is the fundamental form in which human groups express relationships. It does not deal with giving, but rather with giving of oneself in whatever is given, which is the manifestation of personal being.

<sup>18</sup>"*Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is "mine" to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is "his", what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot "give" what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it" (CiV, 6).

The phenomenology of the gift describes the manifestation of a reality that is not contained in antecedent conditions. The gift is not a gift if the gift giver is just waiting for it to be deployed or made explicit. The gift in action is gratuity in the sense that the gift giver has no need beforehand and the gift giver is only called as such in the very act of giving (Haya 1997, p. 324).

This is the radical difference between man and other living beings, namely, man has intimacy and it is not closed, but rather is openness. In Polo's words, "intimacy is not an enclosed area, but rather is inwardly open in as much as the person is a gift. On the other hand, both operational immanence and virtue can be called modes of having. Human having is affirmed in giving" (Polo 1999, p. 208–209).

This openness and indeterminacy is what allows man to "build his world," unlike the animals, which are embedded in nature as mentioned earlier. "To cause and to produce are not the same things;" (Polo 2005, p. 13) production, something particular to man, presupposes freedom and intent.

Man produces because he has a spirit (...) while the other animals have needs and vital requirements that are clearly defined by environmental adaptation, man has desires, as well as open and undefined needs. Although human desires are rooted in animal nature, they are not established by adaptation, but rather are mediated by reason and go beyond needs. Animals do not seek utility, but rather passively adapt to changes in their environment. Utility involves the use of reason; it requires interpretation and overcoming what is merely natural (Martínez Echevarría 2015, p. 5–6).

Modern economics focuses on the technical side of production, assuming efficiency as the ultimate goal, with the false belief that "liberation" from moral obligations allows people to finally exercise their freedom. Just as the idea of classical society is based on the gift, modern society later replaced it with the contract.

### 3.5 Beyond the Logic of Gift

While the broad and interesting topic of modern economics goes beyond the scope of this article,<sup>19</sup> it is important to highlight that the eighteenth-century modern economic project—in which Adam Smith, who was influenced by Hume, stands out—intended to limit production to the realm of technique and create a world that governs itself without the need for ethics. Exchange, which occurred in the area of justice, shifted to being governed by the "passions and interests" under the assumption that social order would not be achieved by the efforts of men, but rather by an inexplicable "invisible hand," that would act from the deepest wisdom of nature (Scalzo 2008; Martínez Echevarría 2004).

---

<sup>19</sup>I recognize that the scope of this thesis goes beyond the scope of this article and will be the subject of a future one. For now, it is enough to accept that the modern project is a deliberate attempt to eradicate the gift from social order based on an inaccurate anthropological conception. "Idealizing technical progress, or contemplating the utopia of a return to humanity's original natural state, are two contrasting ways of detaching progress from its moral evaluation and hence from our responsibility." (CiV, 14)

What are the main differences between the gift and the contract in terms of exchange? The first difference is gratuity. While the gift is free and forms part of the things that the subject values, exchange goods have a price that respond to a kind of equilibrium-equality logic. The second difference is that, when putting himself in the gift, the gift giver offers himself for the recognition of the other; in the case of exchange, exchange goods are evaluated regardless of who buys or sells them. Gift giving is a challenge given that accepting (the object and, therefore, the person) requires requiting (just as refusing implies denying the other); exchange is the result of a negotiation in which the parties consider their own interests. The aim of the exchange based on the gift is to found and sustain a bond or relationship that creates a new identity for both gift givers. Contractual exchange, on the other hand, is impersonal and the involved parties appear as subjects of law; they aim for a situation of equilibrium (zero-sum). Proportional reciprocity emphasizes that there is no equality. Finally, the gift can withstand insurmountable debt because its object is a personal relationship, while the logic of the contract demands all debt be repaid.

The presence of the gift is fundamental to getting beyond the crossroads to which modern thought has brought us.<sup>20</sup> Although mainstream economic theory has followed a different course, there are some isolated efforts to include this reality, which, although it is inherent in economic rationality, has been regarded as “extra-economic” by those who have mapped out a positivist intellectual itinerary.<sup>21</sup>

Benedict XVI himself placed the gift in the center of his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, saying that “*Charity in truth* places man before the astonishing experience of gift” (CiV, 34) and that this “makes it possible to hope for a ‘development of the whole man and of all men’” (CiV, 8).

## References

- Aquinas, Thomas. 2006. *Summa Theologiae*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvira, R. 2003. Tener y existir, reflexión y donación. *Anuario Filosófico* XXXVII/3: 575–585.
- Alvira, R. 1995. Intento de clasificar la pluralidad de subsistemas sociales, con especial atención al Derecho. *Persona y Derecho* 33: 41–51.
- Barker, Ernest. 1959. *The political thought of Plato and Aristotle*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Barnes, Jonathan. 1984. *The complete works of Aristotle*, The revised Oxford Translation. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Benedict XVI. 2009. *Caritas in Veritate*. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html).
- Berthoud, A. (2002). *Essais de Philosophie Économique*, ed. Platon, Aristote, Hobbes, and A. Smith, Marx. Arras-Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion.

<sup>20</sup> In my doctoral thesis, *The Origins of Modern Economic Rationality: An approach from the philosophy of economics*, I analyzed how economic theory has evolved to eventually arrive at a dead end. See: <http://hdl.handle.net/10171/23846>.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, the development of the so-called “civil economy” is noteworthy and has mainly been developed by Italians Stefano Zamagni and Luigino Bruni. See, for example, Zamagni and Bruni (2013); Zamagni (2008); Bruni (2006); Bruni (2008).

- Brubaker, Rogers. 2006. *The limits of rationality. An essay on the social and moral thought of Max Weber*. Londres/Nueva York: Routledge.
- Bruni, L. 2006. *Il prezzo della gratuità*. Roma: Città Nuova.
- Bruni, L., and R. Sudgen. 2008. Fraternity: Why the market need not be a morality free zone? *Economics and Philosophy* 24: 36–64.
- Bruni, L. 2008. *Reciprocity, altruism and civil society*. London: Routledge.
- Bruni, L., and S. Zamagni. 2004. *Economia civile. Efficienza, equità, felicità pubblica*. Bologna: II. Mulino.
- Caillé, A. 2000. *Anthropologie du don. Le tiers paradigme*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.
- Crespo, M. 2004. *El perdón: una investigación filosófica*. Madrid: Encuentro.
- Crespo, R. 2008. The economic' according to Aristotle: Ethical, political and epistemological implications. *Foundations of Science* 13: 3–4.
- Cruz Prados, A. 2006. *Ethos y Polis. Bases para una reconstrucción de la Filosofía Política*. Pamplona: EUNSA.
- Cruz, J. 2012. ¿Qué significa dar? Un apunte fenomenológico sobre Santo Tomás. <http://www.leynatural.es/2012/11/15/>.
- Falgueras, I. 2013. *El dar, actividad plena de la libertad trascendental*, Studia Poliana, vol. 15. Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra.
- Finley, M. 1970. Aristotle and economic analysis. *Past and Present* 47: 3–25.
- García Villoslada, R. 1976. *Raíces históricas del luteranismo*. Madrid: BAC.
- Gillespie, M. 2008. *The theological origins of modernity*. Chicago/Londres: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gilson, E. 2007. *Juan Duns Escoto. Introducción a sus posiciones fundamentales*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Gilson, E. 2009. *Introducción a la filosofía cristiana*. Madrid: Encuentro.
- Girard, R. 2009. *La violencia y lo sagrado*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Godbout, J. 2000. *Le don, le dette, l'identité: Homo donatorversus homo economicus*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Godbout, J., and A. Caillé. 2000. *L'esprit du don*. Paris: La Découverte & Syros.
- Godelier, M. 1998. *El enigma del don*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- González, A. 2006. Thomistic metaphysics: Contemporary interpretations. *Anuario Filosófico* XXXIX(2): 401–437.
- González, A.L. 2013. *Persona, libertad, don. Lección inaugural del curso académico 2013–14 (6 de septiembre de 2013)*. Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra.
- Haya, F. 1997. *El ser personal. De Tomás de Aquino a la metafísica del don*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Hénaff, M. 2003. Religious ethics, gift exchange and capitalism. *European Journal of Sociology* 44(03): 293–324.
- Hénaff, M. 2010. *The price of truth: Gift, money and philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langholm, O. 1983. *Wealth and money in the Aristotelian tradition*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.
- Llano, A. 2004. *Deseo, violencia, sacrificio. El secreto del mito según René Girard*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Martínez Echevarría, M. 2004. Orden y progreso, Procesos de autoorganización. In Rubio de Urquía, R. et al (cord.). Unión Editorial, Madrid.
- Martínez Echevarría, M. 2010. Don y desarrollo, bases de la economía. *Scripta Theologica* 42: 121 a 138.
- Martínez Echevarría, M. 1983. *Evolución del Pensamiento Económico*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.
- Martínez Echevarría, M. 2015. Economía y producción en el pensamiento de Leonardo Polo. In *Comentarios al pensamiento de Polo sobre economía*, coord. J. García González. Madrid: Bubok.
- Mateo Seco, L. 1978. *Martín Lutero: sobre la libertad esclava*. Madrid: Emesa.
- Mauss, M. 2009. *Ensayo sobre el don. Forma y función del intercambio en las sociedades arcaicas*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Katz.
- Meikle, S. 1979. Aristotle and the political economy of the Polis. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99: 57–73.
- Meikle, S. 1995. *Aristotle's economic thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Marx, Karl. 1988. *El capital*. Barcelona: Antalbe.
- Millet, P. 1991. *Lending and borrowing in ancient Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moreno Almarcegui, A. 2010. Ensayo sobre el don. Actas del Seminario del grupo de investigación en Economía Política y Filosofía, Universidad de Navarra.
- Moreno, A. 2015. Consanguinidad y gracia. El culto a María y José en Occidente. Siglos I-XX. El caso de España, Actas del Seminario del grupo de investigación en Economía Política y Filosofía, Universidad de Navarra.
- Muralt, A. 2002. *La estructura de la filosofía política moderna*. Madrid: Istmo.
- Muralt, A. 2008. *La apuesta de la filosofía medieval. Estudios tomistas, escotistas, ockhamistas y gregorianos*. Madrid: Marcial Pons.
- Orléan, A. 2008. Pour une approche girardienne de l'homme oeconomicus. *Cahiers de L'Herne consacrés à René Girard* 89.
- Polo, L. 1993. *Presente y futuro del hombre*. Madrid: Rialp.
- Polo, L. 1996. Tener y dar. In *Sobre la existencia Cristiana*, 103–136. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Polo, L. 1997. *Ética. Hacia una versión moderna de los temas clásicos*. Madrid: Aedos.
- Polo, L. 1999. *Antropología Trascendental I. La persona humana*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Polo, L. 2001. *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Polo, L. 2003. *Quién es el hombre. Un espíritu en el tiempo*. Madrid: Rialp.
- Polo, L. 2005. Lo radical y la libertad. In *Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico*, 179. Pamplona.
- Polo, L. 2012. *Filosofía y economía*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Rieff, P. 2007. *Charisma. The gift of grace and how it has been taken away from us*. Nueva York: Pantheon Books.
- Ritchie, D. 1894. Aristotle's subdivisions of particular justice. *Classical Review* 8(May): 185–192.
- Rubio de Urquía, R. y Pérez-Soba, J. (eds.). 2014. La doctrina social de la Iglesia. Estudios a la luz de la encíclica Caritas in veritate. AEDOS, Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, Madrid.
- Sánchez de la Cruz, C. 2012. *Don y gratuidad en el pensamiento de Joseph Ratzinger. Claves para la teología moral*. Madrid: Perpetuo socorro.
- Scalzo, G. 2008. *Génesis del concepto de interés propio. Cuadernos Empresa y Humanismo*, vol. 108. Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones UNAV.
- Scalzo, G. 2012. *La racionalidad en Max Weber. Cuadernos Empresa y Humanismo*, vol. 118. Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones UNAV.
- Scalzo, G. 2014. Génesis del pensamiento económico: dos visiones en pugna. *Cauriensia* IX: 341–374.
- Sellés, J. 2007. *Antropología para inconformes. Una antropología abierta al futuro*. Madrid: Rialp.
- de Simone, R. 2011. *An analysis of the history of gift*. Pamplona: Reconstructing Personal Gift.
- Soudek, J. 1952. Aristotle's theory of exchange. An inquiry into the origin of economic analysis. In *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 96, 1.
- Weber, M. 1984. *Economía y Sociedad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Weber, M. 1982. *Ensayos sobre metodología sociológica*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Weber, M. 2008. *La ética protestante y el espíritu del capitalismo. Edición crítica de Francisco Gil Villegas M.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Yepes Stork, R. 1977. *Fundamentos de antropología. Un ideal de la excelencia humana*. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Zamagni, S. (2008). Reciprocity, civil economy, common good. In *Pursuing the common good*, ed. M. Archer et al, 467–502. Vatican City: The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.
- Zamagni, S., and L. Bruni. 2013. *Handbook on the economics of reciprocity and social enterprise*. Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar.