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THE GIFT, THE INDIAN GIFT AND THE 'INDIAN GIFT'*

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This article criticises much of the conventional exegesis of Mauss's celebrated *Essai sur le don*, and proposes a rather different reading of the text which stresses its evolutionary aspects. The Hindu 'law of the gift' is shown to have a key role in the structure of Mauss's argument, though in fact it is quite inconsistent with his central thesis. In this particular instance he was right where anthropologists have generally thought him wrong, and wrong where anthropologists have generally thought him right. In the Maori case, however, his interpretation has much more to recommend it than has generally been recognised. Hindu and Maori ideologies of exchange represent fundamentally opposed types; and it is suggested that we might begin to account for this kind of contrast in terms of broad differences in politico-economy, and—more especially—in terms of the contrast between a World Religion and the kind of religion characteristic of small-scale tribal society. Following Mauss, an ideology of the 'pure' gift is shown to be inseparable from the ideology of the purely interested individual pursuit of utility, and to emerge in parallel to it.

Sir Raymond Firth recalls that on his way to Tikopia he had to rely for transport and hospitality on the Melanesian Mission, and was for some weeks the guest of the Bishop on the Mission yacht.

As we travelled together among the islands we discussed many problems of human relationship in the island communities. Malinowski had only recently published his book *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* in which he stressed the importance of reciprocity as a force of binding obligation in Melanesian social organization. . . . The Bishop borrowed the book from me, read it, and strongly disagreed. He argued vehemently that Melanesians, like other people he said, performed many acts for others freely and without thought of return . . . and he denied the implication of self-interested action. . . . We argued amicably about this and other themes. . . . At last the time came for him to land me on the beach of Tikopia and leave me to my fate. He had shown me many kindnesses, which I could not repay . . . he was retiring from the Mission after many years and we both knew that it was unlikely that we should ever meet again. . . . As he said goodbye, leaving me alone in this remote community he shook me firmly by the hand, said gruffly 'No reciprocity!', turned his back and walked off down the beach to the boat (Firth 1973: 400–1).

This vignette of the knight and the bishop, sailing over a distant tropical sea engaged in earnest debate over the thesis of an expatriate Polish Professor, provides me with an apt introduction to my central theme—for I wish to speak of *ideologies* of reciprocity and non-reciprocity, of the 'Indian gift' and the Indian gift.

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In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922: 176–91), Malinowski ranges transactions along a continuum from ‘pure gifts’ to ‘real barter’. The concept of reciprocity is central; but it has not hardened into the dogma it subsequently became in *Crime and custom in savage society* (1926), where the notion of ‘pure gift’ is retracted. Taking a sufficiently long-term view, we shall find that even with regard to transactions between a Trobriand man and his wife and children ‘the mutual services balance’ (1926: 41) for ‘keen self-interest and a watchful reckoning . . . runs right through’ (p. 27). Rather than being slave to custom, the ‘savage’ is as canny as the ‘civilised businessman’ and has quite as sharp an eye for the main chance. He cares more, it is true, for prestige than material pay-offs; and though he is certainly not Economic Man, he is nonetheless Maximising Man. Obligations are kept because ‘the chain of reciprocal gifts and counter-gifts . . . (benefit) both sides equally’ (p. 40); and because the costs of reneging on them are too great in terms of ‘self-interest, ambition and vanity’ (p. 67). Supernatural sanctions are either absent altogether (p. 51), or are relatively easily evaded by means of counter-magic (p. 80).

The various elements in this model—the tendency to see exchanges as essentially *dyadic* transactions between *self-interested individuals*, and as premised on some kind of *balance*; the tendency to play down *supernatural* sanctions, and the total contempt for questions of *origin*—all these constituted an important legacy of Malinowski’s teaching, and directly or indirectly exercised a major influence over much of the subsequent literature. In Firth’s writings, for example, we not only find all Malinowski’s mistrust of the sanctioning power of ‘recondite beliefs’ (Firth 1929: 415), but also a similar emphasis on the individual choice-making actor (e.g. Firth 1967).

The same influence can also be seen in Leach’s criticism of Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) thesis that ranked regimes of generalised exchange are inherently unstable since they inhibit a closure of the matrimonial cycle. Although the wife-givers may not receive *women* in exchange, says Leach, the rule of reciprocity is nonetheless maintained since they are compensated by all kinds of counter-prestations of a different nature; and it is for this reason that the Kachin system is not in fact subject to the kind of instability envisaged by Lévi-Strauss (Leach 1961: 90). So while Lévi-Strauss’s model of generalised exchange is based on a system of *indirect* reciprocity and—relative to systems of restricted exchange—presupposes an expansion of trust and credit, Leach’s alternative invites us to view the situation in terms of an endless sequence of *dyadic* exchanges which are in the long term balanced. Instead of a speculative venture, exchange is a *quid pro quo* based on a certainty of returns.

Similar assumptions are built into Blau’s (1967) discussion of exchange and power, and Weiner’s (1976, 1980) criticisms of Sahlins. Both operate with a similar premiss of balance so that when—in Blau’s case—the exchange itself is *not* balanced, the deficit is compensated for by an increment in power to the creditor which restores the equilibrium. Both assume that exchange takes place between calculating individuals, so that Weiner can claim that with what she calls the ‘gift myth’, the anthropologist is merely ‘perpetuating and creating an image of “the primitive” as a person, or “primitive society” as a way of life, that has survived on some fundamental principle *other than self-interest*’ (1976: 221).

It would be tedious, but not difficult, to multiply examples. The general message would be the same. The gift is always an 'Indian gift'—that is, one 'for which an equivalent return is expected'¹—and the notion of a 'pure gift' is mere ideological obfuscation which masks the supposedly *non*-ideological verity that nobody does anything for nothing. So it is that anthropology often seems to be endlessly rediscovering the moral of Mandeville's *Fable of the bees*. Publick Benefit derives from Private Vice. Society is created by, and its cohesion results from, an endless sequence of exchanges in which all pursues their own advantage (however conceived).

All this may be obvious. But what is perhaps less so is that this habit of thought has distorted our reading of Mauss's essay on *The gift*. Though Malinowski and Mauss are commonly twinned as the joint progenitors of the anthropological understanding of exchange, it is as well to remember that the Durkheimians were one of Malinowski's main polemical targets in *Crime and custom*. Yet paradoxically Malinowskian premisses are only too often read into the Maussian text, which is unconsciously processed through a theoretical filter borrowed from his distinguished contemporary.

Mauss's gift

Mauss's essay has acquired for anthropology many of the qualities of a sacred text. It is treated with reverential awe, the greater part of its teaching is ignored, and it is claimed as the *fons et origo* of quite divergent theoretical positions. It has been cited as a forerunner of Barth's transactionalism (Kapferer 1976: 3); as demonstrating an underlying continuity between gift and commodity exchange (Firth 1973: 370) and as demonstrating the opposite (Gregory 1983: 18 sq.). It has been found to contain an implicit evolutionary model 'remarkably parallel to Marx's argument in *Grundrisse*' (Hart 1983: 46), while Lévi-Strauss—modestly avoiding claims to the mantle of Joshua—likens Mauss to Moses leading his people into the Promised Land of Structuralism, though never quite making it himself (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 37). Our undergraduate students, routinely expected to master this text in their first year, might reasonably be forgiven for wondering just how they ought to understand it.

So elliptical is his writing that Mauss himself does not always seem to be on their side. Nor is the translation, which is both carelessly inaccurate and an unconscious mirror of the prejudices of its own period². Mauss says at the outset that he is concerned 'with words and their meanings', and that he has chosen to concentrate only on areas 'where we have access to the minds of the societies through documentation and philological research' (1966: 2–3; 1973: 149). The translation, however, has little patience with these preoccupations. The textual notes are often elided or even suppressed. But what is more relevant here is that I believe that Cunnison's text both reflects, and has helped to perpetuate, a 'Malinowskian' reading of Mauss's original. Let me give you just one example, taken from the very first page. Mauss writes of prestations as having a 'voluntary character, so to speak, apparently free and without cost, *and yet* constrained and interested . . . They are endowed nearly always with the form

of a present, of a gift generously offered *even when* in the gesture which accompanies the transaction there is only a fiction, formalism and social deception, and *when* there is, at bottom, obligation and economic interest'. In Cunnison's version what is voluntary 'and yet constrained and interested' becomes—in the manner of Malinowski—a disinterested *theory* contradicted by an interested *practice*; 'economic interest' becomes 'economic *self-interest*'; and 'even when' the gesture of generosity is only a fiction is turned into an assertion that it *is* only a fiction³.

In fact, of course, Mauss repeatedly stresses a *combination* of interest and disinterest, of freedom and constraint, in the gift. Nor could 'interest' possibly be a matter of *self-* (in the sense of *individual*) interest. It is not individuals but groups or *moral persons* who carry on exchanges. The *individuals* of modern society are endowed with interests as against the world. The *persons* who enter into the exchanges which centrally concern Mauss do so as incumbents of status positions and do not act on their own behalf (cf. Ekeh 1974: 32).

Nor do persons stand in opposition to the things exchanged. The gift contains some part of the spiritual essence of the donor, and this constrains the recipient to make a return—an argument which has been the source of some embarrassment to Mauss's admirers, who have tended to dismiss it as peripheral. The Maori notion of *hau* is generally taken as the exemplary, or even as the *only*, instance of this 'spirit of the gift'. Sahlins (1972), for example, suggests that in effect Mauss has two *different* answers to the question: 'why are gifts reciprocated?' The first—which is wrong—is the Maori *hau* 'raised to the status of a general explanation'. The second—which is right—is the Hobbesian State of Warre—the gift being the primitive analogue of the social contract. Similarly Lévi-Strauss sees the discussion of the *hau* as a regrettable instance of the anthropologist allowing himself to be mystified by the native, whose culturally specific rationalisations cannot possibly explain a general structural principle. Happily, however, the argument only appears at the beginning of the work, and is merely a point of departure superseded by the end (Lévi-Strauss 1973: xlvi). Firth (1929) comes to an opposite conclusion. Mauss's argument is not a Maori rationalisation but a French one—in support of which we could point, I think, to its similarity to Lévy-Bruhl's notion of 'participations' (cf. MacCormack 1982). I suspect, however—though I cannot prove—that the real source of the idea is neither Maori nor French, but Indian—for as we shall see the basic notion is clearly articulated in the Hindu texts on which Mauss had worked intensively long before Lévy-Bruhl first published his ideas.

As against Firth and Sahlins I will argue at a later stage that Mauss's interpretation of the Maori data has more to recommend it than they allow. As against Sahlins and Lévi-Strauss I should like at this stage to suggest that Mauss does not in fact advance a culturally specific ideology as a general explanation; nor is his point peripheral and limited to the opening sections of the essay. More or less the same argument recurs in relation to the pledge which must be exchanged between the parties to a contract in the law of the ancient Germanic tribes. The indebted party is constrained to make a return since he has handed over as pledge an object which is imbued with his own personality, and which

therefore puts him quite literally in the hands of his creditor. By redeeming it he redeems himself (1966: 60–1; 1973: 253–5).

The general principle—of which this and the Maori *hau* are only two amongst a whole battery of *illustrations*—is the absence of any absolute disjunction between persons and things⁴. It is because the thing contains the person that the donor retains a lien on what he has given away and we cannot therefore speak of an alienation of property; and it is because of this participation of the person in the object that the gift creates an enduring bond between persons. Sahlins thus misrepresents Mauss when he suggests that the argument about ‘the spirit of the gift’ is independent of the argument about the gift as social contract. The gift only succeeds in suppressing the Warre of all against all *because* it creates spiritual bonds between persons by means of things which embody persons. The two aspects are inseparable; and if they were not it would be hard to understand much of Mauss’s antipathy to the modern market.

What is also striking about Sahlins’s commentary on the essay is that he never actually mentions its central purpose: to construct a kind of prehistory of our *modern* kind of legal and economic contract. Evolutionary speculations are at the heart of the enterprise, which displays that genetic concern for the origins of legal forms which was the dominant characteristic of Durkheimian studies of law (Vogt 1983: 31). It is this concern with the origins of the modern contract which explains why of the three obligations Mauss isolates, it is the obligation to make a return which attracts the greatest attention. Cases in which the gift is not reciprocated are virtually excluded from Mauss’s purview by the way in which he has defined his problem in terms of the archaeology of contractual obligation.

The broad outline of the evolution which Mauss traces is from ‘total prestations’ consisting of an exchange between groups in which material goods are only one item amongst a whole range of non-economic transfers, to gift exchange between persons as representative of groups, to modern market exchange between individuals. The last of these has evolved from the first by a gradual process of attenuation or contraction. Exchanges between *groups* which had an aesthetic, religious, moral, legal and economic aspect have been *stripped down* to leave purely *economic* exchanges between *individuals*⁵. (The objects of exchange themselves undergo a parallel evolution. Ceremonial valuables of the kind represented by *kula* armshells become detached from the group and the person, and develop into the kind of depersonalised money found in modern economies [Mauss 1966: 93–4; 1973: 178–9]).

Seen in this light Sahlins’s analogy with Hobbes looks problematic. Hobbes, who starts with the individual, was concerned with the creation of a wider unity out of an ‘originally’ atomised state of humanity; but Mauss, who starts with the group, has reversed the sequence—from an original holism, humanity and human institutions have *become* atomised. What is more the two essays in *Stone Age economics* which immediately precede Sahlins’s homage to Mauss ironically reveal a striking divergence—in a Hobbesian direction—from Mauss’s argument. *The gift* repeatedly stresses that there is no such thing as a ‘natural economy’ where production is *for use* and such exchange as occurs is of *utilities*. But Sahlins’s Domestic Mode of Production is surely only a variant of the

natural economy model⁶, and it locates the *origins* of exchange largely in the utilitarian needs of the proportion of households which inevitably face subsistence failure⁷.

To risk a different analogy, there is—I would argue—a more than superficial convergence between the evolutionary schemes of Marx and Mauss (Cf. Hart 1983); for much in Mauss's essay recalls the progressive rupture Marx discovered between man and the material world, man and his products, and man and man—this resulting in a fragmented world in which the relations of the parts to the whole can no longer be discerned, and leaving the person as a mere rump, an 'abstraction' (cf. Ollman 1976: 133f).

If the Maussian thesis is that the modern contract is the enduring remnant of archaic gift exchange, what then are modern *gifts*? Two readings of the text seem possible. The conventional one would stress a basic continuity between gifts in modern and pre-modern society. But what I understand to be the dominant proposition—which seems to have been completely overlooked—is that in our kind of society gifts come to *represent* something entirely different. *Gift-exchange*—in which persons and things, interest and disinterest are merged—has been fractured, leaving gifts *opposed* to exchange, persons *opposed* to things and interest to disinterest. The ideology of a disinterested gift emerges in parallel with an ideology of a purely interested exchange. So, for example, at the beginning of his chapter on archaic societies, Mauss writes explicitly of a clear distinction between obligatory prestations and (pure) gifts in our own cultural heritage⁸, and asks rhetorically whether such distinctions 'are . . . not of relatively recent appearance in the codes of the great civilizations?' [1966: 46; 1973: 229]. It is *we*, he says elsewhere (1966: 46; 1973: 229), who have opposed 'the ideas of the gift and disinterestedness' to 'that of interest and the individual pursuit of utility'; and it is because the latter have now become the guiding principles of economic life that Mauss wistfully looks back on a primitive past where interest and disinterest are combined.

The whole ideology of the gift, and conversely the whole idea of 'economic self-interest', are *our* invention; and the text explicitly acknowledges the difficulty of using these terms for societies such as the Trobriands where *prestations*—the word itself must have been chosen for its connotations of constraint—are a kind of hybrid between gifts, loans and pledges. The Malinowski of *Argonauts* was certainly in error to suggest that what is given by a father to his children is a 'pure gift'. But as the context makes entirely clear, Mauss's real purpose here is not to suggest that there is no such thing as a pure gift in *any* society, but rather to show that for many the issue simply cannot arise since they do not make the kinds of distinction that we make. So while Mauss is generally represented as telling us how *in fact* the gift is *never* free, what I think he is really telling us is how *we* have acquired a *theory* that it should be.

The interested exchange and the disinterested gift thus emerge as two sides of the same coin. Given a profound dislike of the first, mistrust of the second is only logical. The unreciprocated gift debases the recipient, and the charity of the 'rich almoner' is condemned (1966: 63; 1973: 258)—presumably because it denies obligation and replaces the reciprocal interdependence on which society is founded with an asymmetrical dependence. The remedy for our modern ills is

a system of social security founded on the old morality of gift-exchange, to which we too are heirs.

The beginnings of the ideological revolution which destroyed this ancient wisdom are located in the late Roman Empire with the legal separation of persons from things. But the main thrust of the discussion on Rome is that this distinction—which is central to our concepts of property and market exchange—evolved out of earlier concepts strictly comparable to those of the gift economies described for the ‘primitive’ world. The record, however, does not allow Mauss to establish this as anything more than a ‘likely hypothesis’; and it is here that India comes to his aid as showing that Indo-European law once had gift-exchange institutions like those of the Pacific and America. In a manner which is thoroughly nineteenth century in spirit, and which like much in the essay is strongly reminiscent of Maine⁹, India stands in—as Trautmann (n.d) notes—for Europe’s missing past. Though Maine and Mauss did not agree on whether its innovations stood for moral progress, for both it was Rome which carried the torch of history (as again it did in Mauss’s essay on the person) and India which revealed the fossil record of Indo-European law. It is not perhaps so hard to see why Mauss’s theories have been subjected to selective professional amnesia.

The Indian gift

The central thesis of the essay about the evolutionary origins of the modern contract thus hinges on showing that gift-exchange in the Hindu texts conforms to the model constructed for pre-literate societies. Mauss focuses here on *danadharma*, the ‘law of (religious) gifts’, and in asking how well his model in fact applies I will follow him in this (without, of course, wishing to imply that this law covers all—or even a majority—of transactions). Like Mauss, then, my main concern is with those gifts which rate as *dana*; and I shall refer only in passing to other categories of ‘gift’, and in order to contrast them with *dana*. Lest the restriction appear to confine me to the esoteric, let me remind you of the enormous politico-economic significance of religious gift-giving in the societies which are heirs to this law: one has only to think of the huge landed estates donated to the big South Indian temples; of the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century an estimated 17 to 20 per cent. of the population of Benares (then one of the largest cities in India) were Brahmans living off religious charity (Bayly 1983: 126); or of estimates of 25 to 40 per cent. of net disposable cash income being given to monks in the typical Upper Burmese village (Spiro 1970: 459).

Mauss’s sources provided him with many obvious illustrations of the way in which the gift embodies the person. The donor of cattle sleeps in the byre, eats barley and cow-dung, and at the moment of transfer proclaims: ‘what you are, I am; today I am become your essence, and giving you I give myself’ (1966: 57; 1973: 248). More specifically the gift is held to embody the sins of the donor¹⁰, whom it rids of evil by transferring the dangerous and demeaning burden of death and impurity to the recipient (Heesterman 1964). Nor is it without peril to

the donor, for it binds him dangerously close to one who may prove unworthy. 'A Brahmana who neither performs austerities nor studies the Veda, yet delights in accepting gifts, sinks *with the (donor)* into hell. . . .' (Manu 4: 190). The merit of the gift is thus contingent on that of a worthy recipient. And who should this be but the one who is most unwilling to receive it?

The contemporary significance of this theory has recently been documented by several ethnographers. I have described, for example, how the Brahman priests of Benares see themselves as endlessly accumulating the sin they accept with the gifts of the pilgrims and mourners who visit the city, and how they liken themselves to a sewer through which the moral filth of their patrons is passed. Theoretically they should be able to 'digest' the sin by dint of various ritual procedures of expiation, and by donating the gifts they receive to another Brahman with increment. But quite apart from the fact that this is plainly an economic impossibility, they sadly admit ignorance of the correct ritual procedures. The sewer becomes a cess-pit, with the result that the priest contracts leprosy and rots; he dies a terrible and premature death and then faces the torments of hell. The donor too is an endangered being, for if the priest misuses his gift for some evil purpose he shares in the sin. He must therefore give to a 'worthy vessel'; but the one who is prepared to accept his gifts is almost by definition unworthy to receive them (Parry 1980; n.d.).

Some of my Indianist colleagues will be as used to my recital of these data as I to their response. Such ideas, they claim, are of purely local distribution and do not reflect widespread popular attitudes in rural areas away from the major centres of Sanskritic culture, or exist much outside the Hindi-speaking region (cf. Fuller 1984: 67 sq.). In fact, however, there is evidence of very similar notions from Travancore, Tamilnadu and Gujerat¹¹; and thanks to Raheja's (1985; n.d.) excellent ethnography there can now be little doubt that they are pervasive in some *rural* areas of the north.

Raheja describes two broad categories of prestation as ideologically central in the village where she lived. The first of these is characterised by reciprocity and an ideology of mutuality. By contrast with this is the category of gifts generically known as *dana*—these constituting the most important feature of most rituals and festivals, being given almost daily, and utilising enormous material resources. Such gifts 'send away' inauspiciousness from the donor to the recipient, who may be a Brahman, Barber, Sweeper or a wife-taking affine, to whom the gift will bring misfortune unless the correct ritual precautions are taken. Given that these data derive from a region on which many anthropologists had previously written, I strongly suspect that such ideas about *dana* have a far wider distribution than has so far been recognised; and that it is not because they are absent that they have not been more widely reported in the village ethnography, but rather because the fieldwork was conducted with other preoccupations in mind, and by a generation of ethnographers blinded by a deep-rooted prejudice that the spirit of the gift was merely Maussian meta-physical mystification.

In the Hindu context this notion that the gift contains the person is associated with the idea that the gift is a kind of sacrifice. It is in fact a surrogate for sacrifice appropriate to our degenerate age (Manu 1: 86; Biardeau 1976: 27). In terms of

their symbolism and structure there are many obvious parallels between the two procedures¹². But what is most relevant here is that the identification between the sacrificer and the victim—which in the classical theory is explicitly a substitute for his own person—is carried over into the theory of *dana* as an identification between the donor and his gift. As the victim is a surrogate for the sacrificer, so the gift is a surrogate for the donor. It stands moreover for what he must expiate. Now it is when the objective of the sacrifice is to eliminate *bad* sacredness that Hubert and Mauss (1964: 55) predict that the identification with the victim will be closest *before* the immolation, and that their subsequent separation will be as final as possible. Consistent with this, the identification of the donor with his gift is often highly elaborated before the transfer (as for example when he is weighed against a valuable substance which he then donates), and his separation from it afterwards is absolute.

There is no question, then, of the gift being a loan or pledge. It is alienated in an absolute way, and the very definition of the gift is that it involves the complete extinction of the donor's *proprietary* rights in favour of the recipient (Aiyar 1941: 77; Law 1926: 1). The gift threatens to cement the two together in a dangerous interdependence; but every attempt is made to sever their bond by insisting on the complete alienation of the thing. Under no circumstances, and on pain of terrible supernatural penalties, is the gift resumed. Its evil 'spirit' must *not* come back. While Mauss originally introduced this notion of 'spirit' to explain the inalienability of the object and the necessity of making a return, what it in fact explains in this context is why the gift *must* be alienated, should *never* return, and should endlessly be handed on.

The obligation to make a return is *not* therefore encoded in the *danadharma*. Mauss (1966: 123; 1973: 243) himself was uneasy here and conceded in a footnote that 'on the obligation to make return gifts—our main subject—there are few facts except perhaps Manu VIII, 213. The clearest rule consists in a rule forbidding the return of gifts'. In truth even the verse cited demands the most wilfully cock-eyed reading to make it say anything about reciprocity. 'The clearest rule' is in reality unqualified. A pure asymmetry must obtain. The donor should seek out the reluctant recipient and give freely, for the genuine gift is never solicited. No return of any earthly kind is countenanced and even an increment to the prestige of the donor weakens the gift, which should therefore be made in secret. It is as if—to paraphrase Trautmann (1981: 281–2)—the ancient Pandits had arrived at the modern theory of reciprocity, didn't like what they found, and smartly turned heel.

The pattern of affinal relations amongst the high castes in contemporary north India clearly reflects this ideology. *Kanya dana*, the 'gift of a virgin' along with her dowry, is merely the beginning of an endless series of gifts which flow unilaterally from wife-givers to wife-receivers. Not even a glass of water may be accepted in a village to which one of the daughters of the lineage has been given in marriage; and such prohibitions may even extend to those who rate as wife-takers to one's own wife-takers (Ibbetson quoted in Lewis 1958: 188–9; Parry 1979: 304–5). The chain is conceptually never closed—as is illustrated by Vatuk's (1969) analysis of the Hindi kinship terminology. Lévi-Strauss (1969: 398–9), of course, argues that this theory of marriage by gift is merely

generalised exchange in an illusory guise. In the hypergamous variant of the system, however, female infanticide was in the past widespread, and the highest ranking lineages received brides but gave to none¹³. The very existence of hypergamy, of course, immediately suggests a reciprocal exchange in which the wife-givers in fact gain an increment in status. In the case of many north Indian castes, however, there is no hypergamy in the sense of a systematic ranking of descent lines, and any inferiority on the part of the bride's family is created by the marriage itself (e.g. Vatuk 1975). Clearly in such circumstances the endless stream of gifts cannot be a *quid pro quo* for an elevation in rank and there is no question of a *dyadic* exchange.

A range of quite different examples of this same denial that the gift sets up an obligation to make a return could be given. But what they would all show is that the theory is—as Trautmann (1981: 279) puts it—a 'soteriology, not a sociology of reciprocity . . .'¹⁴. The gift does indeed return to the donor, but it does so as the fruits of *karma*. It is this 'unseen fruit' (*adrstaphala*) which withers on the branch if any return is accrued in the here and now (cf. Aiyar 1941). The return is deferred (in all likelihood to another existence); its mechanism has become entirely impersonal, and the recipient is merely a 'vessel' (*patra*) or conduit for the flow of merit and is himself in no way constrained by the gift or bound to the donor. Even a spiritual accounting is sometimes looked upon with suspicion, and so the best gifts are given merely from a detached sense of duty and without thinking of them as gifts at all (Kane 1974: 8: 42; Mahabharata 13: 49: 3). Whether we emphasise the impersonality of the return, or the ideology which denies that a 'true' gift is made 'with desire' for *any* kind of reward, it seems clear that we are dealing with a transactional theory quite unlike Mauss's Melanesian, Polynesian and American examples. The Hindu 'Law of the gift' does not create society by instituting that constant give-and-take which Malinowski described for the Trobriands. The Trobriand gift may be an 'Indian gift', but the Hindu gift is not.

In passing we might note that much the same theme recurs in Theravada Buddhism, where indeed we find the gift without a recipient at all. Offerings are regularly made to the Buddha, but he has attained *nirvana*, and no longer exists. It is the gods who govern the pragmatic affairs of the world, and with them significantly the ideology is one of reciprocity—offerings for boons. The reciprocated gift belongs to the profane world; the unreciprocated gift to a quest for salvation from it (Ames 1966). Gifts made to those who carry the soteriological message of the Buddha—as they at any rate insist—are never reciprocated. Out of compassion the monk merely provides a 'field of merit' for the laity; but he is not the donor of the merit acquired through the offerings he receives (Strenski 1983).

Nor is an obligation to receive the gift entirely clear. According to the well-known textual formula it is in any case only the Brahmans who have such a duty—and this is paradoxically evaded by the best of them. The Hindu ascetic—unlike the Buddhist monk—is certainly under no such obligation. Nor is a willingness to receive gifts entirely consistent with the honour of the martial Kshatriya, who must never be a supplicant. Hence for him—as Hara (1974) shows—the most appropriate form of marriage which the texts can envisage is

marriage by capture and the open exercise of violence (cf. Trautman 1981: 283). The king's duty is to *make* gifts and he should fund his generosity—as the sacrifice (Heesterman 1959)—through force and valour. Hence the king is in many symbolic ways often identified with the bandit (Shulman 1980; cf. Dirks 1982).

Danadharma thus poses a number of difficulties for our general theories of exchange. It consciously repudiates Gouldner's (1960) universal 'moral norm of reciprocity'. Nor is it clear that the unreciprocated gift produces the differentiation in power predicted by Blau (1967)—for in north India wife-giving affines are commonly required to put up with the most peremptory and disdainful treatment at the hands of those to whom they act as perpetual donors. With the hypergamous variant of this system it seems that Hindu ideology has even succeeded in periodically excluding segments of north Indian society from what Lévi-Strauss (1969: 143) calls 'the *universal form* of marriage'—one based on reciprocity. Nor does Sahlins's (1972: 185 sq.) typology of exchange, in which the 'solidary extreme' of generalised reciprocity is seen as coinciding with the closest social relations, seem wholly applicable. Here the most unbalanced exchanges are represented by the gifts made to the wandering ascetic or to the priest of a faraway pilgrimage centre; while transactions between, for example, a father and son are often talked about in the idiom of a *quid pro quo* in which the son finally settles his debts through the performance of his father's mortuary rites (Parry 1985).

As for Mauss, I think that with regard to the kinds of gifts covered by *danadharma*, that part of his thesis which anthropologists have generally found most problematic (the spirit of the gift) is—with the qualifications I have registered—in fact the most acceptable; while that part of his thesis which anthropologists have accepted most readily (the obligations to receive and make a return) is actually the most problematic. Now it is, of course, true that *danadharma* does not embrace the whole range of transactions which we would rate as gifts. As was indicated earlier in connexion with Raheja's material, there are many other kinds of prestation—most of which are explicitly reciprocal (cf. Parry n.d.). Here, however, there is little indication that the gift contains the donor—except in the loose sense that it may be interpreted as an objective manifestation of his subjective dispositions (or perhaps as material testimony to the skills with which his caste is innately endowed). Where we have the 'spirit', reciprocity is denied; where there is reciprocity there is not much evidence of 'spirit'. The two aspects of the model do not hang together.

The 'Indian gift'

I have shown, then, that the Hindu law of the gift does not display convincing evidence of continuity with the exchange systems Mauss described for Melanesia and Polynesia. But how well do these cases themselves conform to his model? Better, I think, than is sometimes claimed.

It was Mauss who originally noted the problem with Malinowski's classification of the presents made within the Trobriand domestic group as 'pure

gifts'. The Trobrianders themselves describe them as *mapula*, a term which Malinowski translated as 'payment' or 'equivalent', and they clearly state that the presents which a man makes to his wife and her children are a return for her sexual and domestic services. I am aware that Weiner (1980) has denied that this is the exchange, and has questioned Malinowski's gloss for *mapula*. What she shows nevertheless is that such transfers are visualised as part of a long-term cycle of reciprocal and ultimately balanced exchanges. Gifts of descent-group property to outsiders will eventually be reclaimed, and thereby return—as Mauss said of the Maori gift—to their ancestral hearth.

In view of Johansen's (1954: 118) expert conclusion that 'a certain uncertainty' precludes 'actual certainty' on the matter of the Maori *hau*, and of Gathercole's warning (1978) that all we really have to go on is 'the detritus of an (anachronistic) discourse between various Victorian gentlemen', one might think that Ranapiri's famous parting shot should be taken seriously—'enough on that subject'. I therefore comment on the Maori case with all due trepidation.

The crucial evidence is contained in Ranapiri's explanation of a sacrificial offering of birds to the forest. This is elucidated by analogy with a gift exchange in which A gives a valuable to B who passes it on to C. When C makes a return to B, he must give it to A because it is the *hau* of the first gift, and he will become sick or die if he retains it (Mauss 1966: 8–9; 1973: 158–9; Sahlins 1972: 152). To Mauss it seemed that the gift itself is animated with the spirit of its original homeland and donor, to whom it strives to return.

This interpretation was severely criticised by Firth, who confirmed the Maori preoccupation with reciprocity, but argued that the real sanctions behind it are the threat of witchcraft and the economic and social costs of defaulting on the exchange. The *hau* is not a 'purposive entity'; nor can the *hau* of things be identified with that of persons (1929: 413). These criticisms have been generally accepted (e.g. Johansen 1954: 117; Forge 1972: 529; Parkin 1976: 171)¹⁵. In contesting them I pay tribute to Firth's own ethnography, and acknowledge the central importance of the sanctions he outlined.

In the Polynesian context Mauss makes it clear that the kinds of things which embody persons belong to the category of valuables known as *taonga*, which constitute the *sacra* of the family. The supreme example of *taonga* are the 'treasure items', or 'heirloom valuables', of the kinship group—with whose land and history they are identified, and into whose genealogies they enter. Johansen (1954: 104) reports that one is related to them as a kinsman, and that they are greeted and honoured like chiefs. Such valuables were exchanged as gifts between groups, and were used to conclude a peace treaty, for the *mana* inherent within them has the capacity to create a strong bond between people. These heirlooms are closely associated with rights to land (Firth 1929: 348), and the land is conceived to be the source of a Maori's spiritual well-being and identity (Hanson & Hanson 1983: 65). It therefore seems clear that in gifting such valuables a Maori was in an important sense gifting an aspect of his personhood. This identification between persons and things is again illustrated by the belief that the possessions of a man of rank—or indeed anything he called by his name or referred to as a part of his body—were permeated by his sacred power, and therefore dangerous to others (Firth 1929: 336). Given all this I cannot see how

there can be any clear-cut distinction between the *hau* of persons and things. Perhaps their blending together reflects not so much the metaphysical pre-occupations of the Collège de France, as their separation reflects the pragmatic rationalism of the LSE. At least in the case of heirloom valuables the idea of the thing itself striving to return to its homeland seems perfectly consistent with Maori representations of these objects.

But there is also, I think, a more important kind of connexion between reciprocity and the *hau*. At the highest level of abstraction, Sahlins glosses the *hau* as a 'general principle of productiveness', which in specific contexts might be rendered as 'yield', 'return on' or even 'profit'. Thus the *hau* of a good is its 'yield', and when Ranapiri says that B must return the second valuable to A because it is the *hau* of the first valuable, what he is really enunciating is the precept that 'one man's gift should not be another man's capital'. 'We have', says Sahlins (1972: 162), 'to deal with a society in which freedom to gain at another's expense is not envisioned by the relations and forms of exchange'. The *hau* thus represents a kind of pre-emptive ideological strike against market principles. It is here that I find Sahlins's argument weakest. Ranapiri said nothing whatever about an equivalence in exchange. On the contrary, a 'profit' is clearly implied by the very instance he was trying to explain. The hunters return *some* of the birds to the forest, but keep the rest.

As Sahlins sees it, the great advantage of his analysis over previous ones is that it enables him to explain why Ranapiri invoked a three-party exchange—the third actor being logically necessary to illustrate the principle of a yield or profit on the original gift. Sahlins analyses accounts of three different exchanges in which the *hau* figures, and claims that all reveal a similar triadic structure. But what a close reading of these examples actually reveals is that it is only by sleight of hand that two of them can be represented in this way. The only one which in fact displays this structure is that contained in Ranapiri's text, and this is easily accounted for in other terms¹⁶. What was being explained after all was a sacrifice *which required the mediation of priests*. It was, in other words, a three-party transaction between hunters, priests and forest; and the economic analogy therefore had to be triadic.

What *is*, in my view, valuable in Sahlins's analysis is his stress on the *hau* as a general principle of productiveness; and this insight can—I think—be taken further. What Ranapiri is actually trying to tell us, I would argue, is that the *source* of well-being and productiveness *is* reciprocal exchange—and it is this principle that fecundity and increase stem from reciprocity which he emphasises by introducing the *hau* into his discussion at the stage of the return. That exchange *itself* is fertile and promotes increase must have appeared as a self-evident truth to the Maori, since the gift normally attracts an increment, and as it circulates it grows (Firth 1929: 416; Hanson & Hanson 1983: 110). By returning A's gift, B 'nourishes the *hau*' and thereby ensures—contra Sahlins—a future 'profit' or 'yield'. By failing to do so, by 'averting the *hau*', B would destroy the source of his own productiveness and vitality, and would therefore succumb to witchcraft or otherwise sicken and die. Again experience proves the theory, for one who defaults on his exchanges will cease to be an acceptable partner, and will be excluded from this apparently magical source of growth and productiv-

ity. The gift of a Maori valuable, I conclude, does embody the person; and what Firth dismisses as 'recondite beliefs' about the *hau* do sanction a return. By contrast with the 'spirit' of the Hindu gift which brings destitution and death to one who fails to pass it on along a chain which is conceptually never closed, the 'spirit' of the Maori gift entails like consequences for one who fails to return it to the original donor.

The ideology of the 'pure gift'

It is in any case obvious that both Trobriand and Maori exchange reveal a preoccupation with reciprocity as a norm of social conduct which contrasts with its denial in the Hindu law. In what kinds of social system, then, do we find values of this latter kind, and why? Since the notion of reciprocity has been used so uncritically that it is often unclear whether what is being described is a matter of empirical fact, indigenous theory or anthropological assumption about the nature of human behaviour (MacCormack 1976), an answer to these questions can only be tentative.

In *some* context reciprocity is surely a normative expectation in every society; and I think it probable that the vast majority also make some place for the notion of a free gift. A return, argued Simmel (1950: 392), is always ethically constrained; but the very first gift which initiates a relationship has (or better, is often seen as having¹⁷) a voluntary and spontaneous character which no subsequent gift can possess, and for this reason it can never be entirely reciprocated. Schwimmer (1973) describes a Melanesian society in which every social relationship is ideologically premised on exchange. Yet how could exchange ever begin in the first place? Only, the Orokaiva myths tell us, by an original free gift of the primal ancestors¹⁸. Empirically, then, it is not a question of either an ideology of reciprocity or of its repudiation, but rather of a significant difference in the extent to which these possibilities are elaborated.

The premium placed on reciprocity in Melanesian societies is so striking that Lévi-Strauss (1973: 33), commenting on the convergence between Mauss and Malinowski, was led to wonder whether it was not the Melanesians themselves who were the true authors of the theory. It was the societies of Melanesia and Polynesia which first attracted explanation in these terms, and the principle does not have the same prominence in the Africanist literature (MacCormack 1976). For 'traditional' African societies, however, I can find little evidence of any elaborated ideology of the 'pure gift'. It is surely rather the ancient literate civilisations of Europe and Asia which have stressed this notion.

Mauss—as I have shown—provides some preliminary hints as to why this might be. Those who make free and unconstrained contracts in the market also make free and unconstrained gifts outside it. But these gifts are defined as what market relations are not—altruistic, moral and loaded with emotion. As the economy becomes progressively disembedded from society, as economic relations become increasingly differentiated from other types of social relationship, the transactions appropriate to each become ever more polarised in terms of their symbolism and ideology. We might therefore argue that an ideology of the

'pure gift' is most likely to arise in highly differentiated societies with an advanced division of labour—such an ideology being a logical end-product of the kind of sequence Lévi-Strauss (1969) traces from restricted to generalised to complex systems of reciprocity, where each step implies a greater indirectness of returns and an expansion of the social universe. Again, in an economy with a sizeable market sector gift-exchange does not have the material significance it has for the many tribal societies in which it provides the only access to crucial scarce resources. Gifts can therefore be given with the sole objective of cementing social relations and without any insistence on an equivalent return (cf. Schwimmer 1973: 49). Moreover if—as Mauss argues—gifts are the primitive analogue of the social contract, then they clearly carry a social load which in centralised politics is assumed by the state. In other words, gifts can assume a much more voluntaristic character as their political functions are progressively taken over by state institutions.

I am suggesting, then, that an elaborated ideology of the 'pure' gift is most likely to develop in state societies with an advanced division of labour and a significant commercial sector. But what is also in my view essential to its articulation is a specific type of belief system, as is suggested by the fact that in all of the major world religions great stress is laid on the merit of gifts and alms, ideally given in secrecy and without expectation of any worldly return.

There are, as Obeyesekere (1968; 1980) has argued, certain fundamental differences between these historical world religions and the religions characteristic of small-scale tribal society. Though the idea of salvation—defined as 'a state or condition from which suffering has been eliminated'—is found in both contexts, the majority of tribal religions are not salvation religions; and in those which are, 'compensation for suffering is meted out in the other world irrespective of the actor's behaviour in this world. Ethical considerations do not influence the topography of the other world. . . . The kingdom of heaven is for saint and sinner alike' (1968: 12, 14). In such societies social behaviour tends to be sanctioned largely by secular rather than religious morality; 'there is no systematic attempt to incorporate the secular moral code into a religious one' and hence no thoroughgoing 'ethicization' (1980: 154). Where religious norms are violated, supernatural sanctions tend to be immediate rather than saved up for the after-life¹⁹. In the world religions, by contrast, social behaviour *is* systematically ethicised. This 'implies the religious evaluation of moral action, actions that are morally good or bad are . . . also religiously good or bad' (1980: 147). The consequence is an elaboration of the concepts of sin (in the sense of 'a violation of the religious ethics of morality' [1968: 14]) and religious merit. These determine the individual's ultimate destiny on the principle of contingency of supernatural reward, and entail the bifurcation of the other world—hell for sinners and heaven for saints. In the South Asian context, Obeyesekere's contrast is clearly illustrated by the comparisons which Fürer-Haimendorf (1967; 1974) and Bailey (1981) have drawn between tribal religions and the Indian world religions.

An ethicised salvation religion, in which rewards are contingent on conduct, is clearly likely to have the effect of orienting the *ideal goals* of social action towards a future existence. Those whose horizons are limited by the rewards of

this world will not gather the 'unseen fruits' of the next; and the ethic of intention requires that the expectation of a return in the here and now should be denied. Moreover, the notion of salvation itself devalues this profane world of suffering. The unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage to it, a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation.

The more radical the opposition between this world and a world free from suffering to come, the more inevitable is the development of a *contemptus mundi* which culminates in the institution of renunciation, but of which the charitable gift—as a kind of lay exercise in asceticism—is also often an expression. In abandoning its millenarian expectations in favour of an eschatology of heaven and hell, the early Christian Church widened the chasm between this world and the Kingdom of God, and thereby enormously boosted both the spirit of asceticism and a preoccupation with charitable 'good works' (Troeltsch 1931: 113).

It is of course the case that the common fate of such 'free' gifts is to become a purchase price of salvation, resulting in the kind of actuarial calculation represented by the Merit Books of the pious Buddhist (e.g. Spiro 1970), or the arithmetical relationship between alms-offerings and the elimination of sin established by Cyprian (Westermarck 1906: 555). But this same ideology may react against such reckoning in the name of an ideal of purely disinterested action.

I do not, of course, deny the important differences between the World Religions. I have spoken of an other-worldly orientation, but in the case of certain Protestant sects (and of some brands of Islam) it might have been more accurate to speak of an emphasis on creating an image of that other world in this one. The effect is nonetheless to direct action towards a transcendental ideal, and to devalue the world which actually exists along with the returns which can be expected within it. Though the stress which Hinduism and Buddhism place on the notion that the spiritual worth of the gift is contingent on that of its recipient has many parallels in medieval Christianity (Lawrence 1984), again there is certainly a difference in emphasis. To a far greater extent than in the Indian religions, Christianity—with its notion that all men are fashioned equally in the image of God—has developed a *universalistic* conception of purely disinterested giving.

But it was also, of course, the Christian world which developed the theory of pure utility, and that—as Mauss indicated—is perhaps no accident. Since the things of this world are seen as antithetical to the person's true self, his soul, an ethicised salvation religion is I think likely to encourage that separation of persons from things which is an ideological precondition of market exchange, and which significantly was first effected in the West by the laws of a *Christian* Emperor. It is surely significant that the pagan practice which the early missionary monks who Christianised the Germanic peoples were most concerned to extirpate was the burying of treasure with the dead (Little 1978: 5). 'The Christian soul', as Kiernan (1978: 374) notes, 'was purified in heaven from all taint of ownership', and not even the Toriest theologian has thought to ask 'whether each new arrival will be assigned his own personal harp'.

More importantly a *universalistic* ethic of disinterested giving can surely only

encourage the creation of a separate sphere which is immune from the requirements of such a demanding precept. The ideology of the pure gift may thus itself promote and entrench the ideological elaboration of a domain in which self-interest rules supreme. It is not I think coincidental that the ideology of the 'pure gift' is accorded such prominence among groups—such as the Jews and Jains—which have a particularly close historical association with market trade, for the two spheres define each other—sometimes less, but with us today as sharply as ever. With renewed ideological stress on the autonomy of the market go renewed pleas for philanthropy to assume the responsibilities it denies. It was possibly through such speculations that Mauss arrived at his now perhaps not so quaint-sounding moral conclusion—that the combination of interest and disinterest in exchange is preferable to their separation.

Even before the publication of *Crime and custom*, Mauss had shown that *both* positions in that long-running argument sparked off by Malinowski's book, adjourned on the beach at Tikopia and endlessly resumed in the anthropological literature, are entirely given by this ideological separation and belong to a discourse peculiar to a certain kind of society.

NOTES

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¹ This definition is given both by the SOED and, in 1764, by Hutchinson in *The history of the colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (cited in Hyde 1979: 3). One or two native informants have told me that in their understanding the expression refers to a gift which is reclaimed after it has been made; but here I follow the dictionary usage.

² The deficiencies of the translation have been commented on by Leach 1955; Schwimmer 1973: 10; van Baal 1975: 10; Trautmann 1981: 279 and n.d., and Fuller (in a letter to *Man* which substantiated the charge of inaccuracy in some detail, but which was not published).

³ Mauss (1973: 147) wrote of

'le caractère volontaire, pour ainsi dire, apparemment libre et gratuit, et cependant contraint et intéressé de ces prestations. Elles ont revêtu presque toujours la forme du présent, du cadeau offert généreusement même quand, dans ce geste qui accompagne la transaction, il n'y a que fiction, formalisme et mensonge social, et quand il y a, au fond, obligation et intérêt économique'.

Cunnison by comparison, speaks of

'prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest' (Mauss 1961).

The first sentence quoted above was one of Fuller's examples of the problems with the translation.

⁴ Testimony to the importance which Mauss attached to this inseparability of persons and things in primitive and archaic societies is again found in his much later essay on the person (Mauss 1979). But in view of the enormous significance for our modern concepts of property and exchange which *The gift* attributes to their eventual separation, it is perhaps surprising that in the subsequent essay he did not reverse the perspective to explore the consequences of this historical break for the concept of the person.

⁵ In the context of sacrifice Mauss (1973: 167) observes that one of the first groups of beings with

whom men had to contract were the gods and the spirits of the dead. This might perhaps be taken to suggest that just as Durkheim and Mauss (1973) had discovered the origins of the theoretical classifications of modern science in religion, so the gift essay tentatively located the origins of modern secular forms of contract and exchange in sacrifice.

⁶ It is, he says, 'cousin to Marx's "simple circulation of commodities"', thus to the celebrated formula $C \rightarrow M \rightarrow C'$. . . primitive peoples remain constant in their pursuit of use values, related always to exchange with an interest in consumption, so to production with an interest in provisioning' (Sahlins 1972: 83).

⁷ 'Almost every family living solely by its own means sooner or later discovers it has not the means to live'. Unless, therefore, 'the domestic economy is forced beyond itself the entire society does not survive' (Sahlins 1972: 101, 86).

⁸ It is true that the adjective 'pure' is Cunnison's interpolation, but it seems justified in that it draws attention to the strong distinction Mauss emphasises between 'l'obligation et la prestation non gratuite, d'une part, et le don, de l'autre'.

⁹ More specifically, I have in mind here their common interest in the evolution of the contract; and the ideas that ancient law knew 'next to nothing of individuals' (Maine 1960: 152), that the conflation of persons and things is characteristic of societies based on status, and that their legal separation constituted a major historical watershed (1960: 164).

¹⁰ Mauss (1973: 249–50; 1966: 125–6) acknowledged this hastily in a footnote, only to dismiss it as an 'absurd theological interpretation'. Since what—as we shall see—the notion actually explains is why the gift should *not* be accepted in the first place, and cannot in the second place be reciprocated, Mauss clearly had difficulty in coming to terms with it.

¹¹ Fuller (1984: 67 sq., 196) refers to an array of sources which clearly document the extremely wide distribution of such notions, though paradoxically his own discussion is premised on their lack of Pan-Indian significance. On the prevalence of these ideas in the South Indian literary tradition, see Shulman 1985.

¹² At the most obvious level, both require a consecration; both transform the religious state of the donor/sacrificer, and both constitute a means of communication with the divine via an intermediary. Given these parallels it is indeed curious that, as Fuller (1984: 196) notes, Mauss 'failed to tie explicitly his analysis of gifts to his earlier work on sacrifice'. In a paragraph which strikingly presages *The gift*, Hubert and Mauss (1964: 100) described sacrifice in terms of 'disinterestedness. . . mingled with self-interest. That is why it has frequently been conceived as a form of contract'. Sacrifice, they continue, presupposes an intermediary which (like the gift) simultaneously unites and separates two opposed parties who 'draw close to each other without giving themselves entirely'. They wind up, what is more, by endorsing Tylor's (1904) account of an evolution from the sacrifice made in the expectation of a return, to an ideology in which it becomes an act of self-abnegation—on my reading precisely the development which Mauss traced for the gift (or to be more precise, for one aspect of the archaic prestation).

¹³ It is true that such systems are prone to the kind of instability which Lévi-Strauss predicted; but it is also the case that they have a tendency to re-establish themselves—along with the pattern of matrimonial non-reciprocity they institute (Parry 1979: 247 sq.).

¹⁴ In the area of political values the same ideological denial of reciprocity has been documented in Mayer's (1981) fine discussion of the concept of *seva*; and it is such ideas which underlie the *Bhudan* (or 'land gift') movement of Vinoba Bhave—whose objective was quite as much to provide the landed with a route to salvation through disinterested giving as it was to provide land for the landless (Oommen 1972: 35f; Gonda 1965: 228).

¹⁵ Two recent dissenting voices are MacCormack (1982) and Weiner (1985). Unfortunately the latter had not been published at the time of writing, for it contains much to support the view that Ranapiri was talking about *taonga*-valuables; that these valuables do indeed embody the person and that Mauss was essentially correct in suggesting that the gift is not inert. In certain other respects, however, Weiner's interesting interpretation differs from my own.

¹⁶ The other two examples were those of the cape which Best had ordered from a weaver (Sahlins 1972: 161); and the 'payment' made to his teacher by the 'sorcerer's apprentice' (1972: 103–5). In the first case the weaver *refused* to deal with the trooper who tried to buy the cape, and thereby preserved the proper *dyadic* transaction; while the second case can only be made triadic by treating the victim as a party to the exchange (rather than as the 'thing' exchanged).

¹⁷ The qualification is necessary, for it is surely also the case that relationships are sometimes thought to be initiated out of self-interest.

¹⁸ It might, I recognise, be possible to argue that we should interpret these myths not so much as a statement about the impossibility of initiating exchange without priming the pump with a free gift, but more as a statement that the *only* beings capable of making such a gift were the original ancestors. Either way, my central point would stand: even in this case we find some ideological space (however minimal) for the notion of a free and unconstrained gift.

¹⁹ We are dealing, of course, with an ideal type, and Obeyesekere (1980: 153) makes it clear that empirically there is no religion entirely devoid of ethical implications.

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