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Mauss, Marcel 2012, 'Excerpts from the Gift' in McGee, R. Jon & Warms, Richard L., Anthropological theory : an introductory history, 5th ed., McGraw-Hill, New York, pp. 85-97.

very different phenomena, which ought to be distinguished, are confused.

[d] This close connection between life and structure, organ and function, may be easily proved in sociology because between these two extreme terms there exists a whole series of immediately observable intermediate stages which show the bond between them. Biology is not in the same favorable position. But we may well believe that the inductions on this subject made by sociology are applicable to biology and that, in organisms as well as in societies, only differences in degree exist between these two orders of facts.

6. *Excerpts from the Gift*

MARCEL MAUSS (1872–1950)

[*Our reprint of Mauss' work opens with section three of Chapter 2. In sections one and two of that chapter, comprising about 5,000 words, Mauss describes the rules of generosity on the Andaman Islands and the Kula trade in Melanesia, as well as other associated exchange practices. These exchanges, he believes, are the material expressions of what Durkheim called social facts. They are used to forge and maintain alliances, and they replicate the divisions between the people involved in them. The interdependence of the exchange network increases social solidarity. He continues here with a discussion of potlatch among Native Americans.*]

3. HONOUR AND CREDIT (NORTH-WEST AMERICA)

From these observations on Melanesian and Polynesian peoples our picture of gift economy is already beginning to take shape.[1] Material and moral life, as exemplified in gift exchange, functions there in a manner at once interested and obligatory. Furthermore, the obligation is expressed in myth and imagery, symbolically and collectively; it takes the form of interest in the objects exchanged; the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble. The lasting influence of the objects exchanged is a direct expression of the manner in which sub-groups within segmentary societies of an archaic type are constantly embroiled with and feel themselves in debt to each other.

Indian societies of the American North-West have the same institutions, but in a more radical and accentuated form.[2] Barter is unknown there. Even now after long contact with Europeans it does not appear that any of the considerable and continual transfers of wealth take place otherwise than through the formality of the potlatch.* We now describe this institution as we see it.

First, however, we give a short account of these societies.[3] The tribes in question inhabit the North-West American coast—the Tlingit and Haida of Alaska,* and the Tsimshian and Kwakiutl of British Columbia.* They live on the sea or on the rivers and depend more on fishing

From *The Gift* (1925)

[1] The parts of Mauss' essay reproduced here contain more than 100 notes. Space limitations prevent us from reproducing them here, but asterisks have been included to give the reader an idea of the volume of notes Mauss wrote. The intrepid reader can look them up in a complete version of *The Gift*.

[2] Mauss implies here that the purpose of these practices cannot be explained simply by economics. If their root purposes were economic, they would have disappeared with European contact.

[3] The next several paragraphs provide a broad ethnographic description of the potlatch customs of several Northwest Native American groups, much of which is drawn from Franz Boas' work. Mauss' description is a catalog of material culture, but his real interests lie in examining patterns of social interaction.

than on hunting for their livelihood; but in contrast to the Melanesians and Polynesians they do not practice agriculture. Yet they are very wealthy, and even at the present day their fishing, hunting and trapping activities yield surpluses which are considerable even when reckoned on the European scale. They have the most substantial houses of all the American tribes, and a highly evolved cedar industry. Their canoes are good; and although they seldom venture out on to the open sea they are skillful in navigating around their islands and in coastal waters. They have a high standard of material culture. In particular, even back in the eighteenth century, they collected, smelted, molded and beat local copper from Tsimshian and Tlingit country. Some of the copper in the form of decorated shields they used as a kind of currency. Almost certainly another form of currency was the beautifully embellished Chilkat blanket-work still used ornamentally, some of it being of considerable value.* The peoples are excellent carvers and craftsmen. Their pipes, clubs and sticks are the pride of our ethnological collections. Within broad limits this civilization is remarkably uniform. It is clear that the societies have been in contact with each other from very early days, although their languages suggest that they belong to at least three families of peoples.*

Their winter life, even with the southern tribes, is very different from their summer life. The tribes have a two-fold structure: at the end of spring they disperse and go hunting, collect berries from the hillsides and fish the rivers for salmon; while in winter they concentrate in what are known as towns. During this period of concentration they are in a perpetual state of effervescence.[4] The social life becomes intense in the extreme, even more so than in the concentrations of tribes that manage to form in the summer. This life consists of continual movement. There are constant visits of whole tribes to others, of clans to clans and families to families. There is feast upon feast, some of long duration. On the occasion of a marriage, on various ritual occasions, and on social advancement, there is reckless consumption of everything which has been amassed with great industry from some of the richest coasts of the world during the course of summer and autumn. Even private life passes in this manner; clansmen are invited when a seal is killed or a box of roots or berries opened; you invite everyone when a whale runs aground.

Social organization, too, is fairly constant throughout the area though it ranges from the matrilineal phratry (Tlingit and Haida) to the modified matrilineal clan of the Kwakiutl; but the general characters of the social organization and particularly of totemism are repeated in all the tribes. They have associations like those of the Banks Islanders of Melanesia, wrongly called "secret societies," which are often inter-tribal; and men's and women's societies among the Kwakiutl cut across tribal organization. A part of the gifts and counterprestations[5] which we shall discuss goes, as in Melanesia,* to pay one's way into the successive steps* of the associations. Clan and association ritual follows the marriage of chiefs, the sale of coppers, initiations, shamanistic séances and funeral ceremonies, the latter being more particularly pronounced among the Tlingit and Haida. These are all accomplished in the course of an indefinitely prolonged series of potlatches. Potlatches are given in all directions, corresponding to other potlatches to which they

[4] For Durkheim and his followers, members of the *L'Année Sociologique* school, the idea of periods of "effervescence" was critical in the binary separation of sacred and profane. For example, discussing the Australian Aborigines in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* Durkheim wrote that sacred times, when people assemble, were marked by "a sort of electricity . . . which transports them to exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds . . . each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. . . . How could such experiences as these . . . fail to leave [an individual convinced] that there really exist two heterogeneous and mutually incomparable worlds?" (1965:245–50).

[5] Mauss' work deals with a class of phenomena he calls "prestations," which are a type of gift exchange between groups. They appear "disinterested and spontaneous" but are, in reality, neither. Rather, they are obligatory and enacted under a highly specific system of reciprocity.

are the response. As in Melanesia the process is one of constant give-and-take.

The potlatch, so unique as a phenomenon, yet so typical of these tribes, is really nothing other than gift-exchange.[6] The only differences are in the violence, rivalry and antagonism aroused, in a lack of jural[7] concepts, and in a simpler structure. It is less refined than in Melanesia, especially as regards the northern tribes, the Tlingit and the Haida,* but the collective nature of the contract is more pronounced than in Melanesia and Polynesia.* Despite appearances, the institutions here are nearer to what we call simple total prestations. Thus the legal and economic concepts attached to them have less clarity and conscious precision. Nevertheless, in action the principles emerge formally and clearly.

There are two traits more in evidence here than in the Melanesian potlatch or in the more evolved and discrete institutions of Polynesia: the themes of credit and honour.*

As we have seen, when gifts circulate in Melanesia and Polynesia the return is assured by the virtue of the things passed on, which are their own guarantees. In any society it is in the nature of the gift in the end to being its own reward. By definition, a common meal, a distribution of *kava,*[8] or a charm worn, cannot be repaid at once. Time has to pass before a counterprestation can be made. Thus the notion of time is logically implied when one pays a visit, contracts a marriage or an alliance, makes a treaty, goes to organized games, fights or feasts of others, renders ritual and honorific service and "shows respect," to use the Tlingit term.* All these are things exchanged side by side with other material objects, and they are the more numerous as the society is wealthier.

On this point, legal and economic theory is greatly at fault.[9] Imbued with modern ideas, current theory tends towards *a priori* notions of evolution,* and claims to follow a so-called necessary logic; in fact, however, it remains based on old traditions. Nothing could be more dangerous than what Simiand[10] called this "unconscious sociology." For instance, Cuq could still say in 1910: "In primitive societies barter alone is found; in those more advanced, direct sale is practiced. Sale on credit characterizes a higher stage of civilization; it appears first in an indirect manner, a combination of sale and loan."* In fact the origin of credit is different. It is to be found in a range of customs neglected by lawyers and economists as uninteresting: namely the gift, which is a complex phenomenon especially in its ancient form of total prestation which we are studying here. Now a gift necessarily implies the notion of credit. Economic evolution has not gone from barter to sale and from cash to credit. Barter arose from the system of gifts given and received on credit, simplified by drawing together the moments of time which had previously been distinct. Likewise purchase and sale—both direct sale and credit sale—and the loan, derive from the same source. There is nothing to suggest that any economic system which has passed through the phase we are describing was ignorant of the idea of credit, of which all archaic societies around us are aware. This is a simple and realistic manner of dealing with the problem, which

[6] Mauss follows Durkheim's idea of social evolution from mechanical to organic solidarity. Simple societies, such as those he is describing, are characterized by mechanical solidarity, which means that their social institutions are not separated, as in complex society. Instead, a few phenomena—called total social phenomena—simultaneously express a great many institutions. Potlatch exchange, as Mauss details below, is such a phenomenon.

[7] Jural: legal.

[8] Kava: a Polynesian ritual beverage consumed to produce a euphoric state. Made from the roots of the kava plant, *Piper methysticum.*

[9] Here Mauss takes aim at simple linear evolutionary schemes. Durkheim and Mauss were hostile to Darwinian models of social evolution, which stressed conflict and competition. In Durkheim's model, social evolution is driven by the need to achieve social solidarity at greater levels of population density and complexity.

[10] François Simiand (1873–1935) was a French economic historian. A student of Durkheim and a socialist, he was critical of scholars of his day and suggested that history could not be studied apart from social and economic structures.

Davy[11] has already studied, of the "two moments of time" which the contract unites.*

No less important is the role which honour plays in the transactions of the Indians. Nowhere else is the prestige of an individual as closely bound up with expenditure, and with the duty of returning with interest gifts received in such a way that the creditor becomes the debtor. Consumption and destruction are virtually unlimited. In some potlatch systems one is constrained to expend everything one possesses and to keep nothing.* The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige.[12] The principles of rivalry and antagonism are basic. Political and individual status in associations and clans, and rank of every kind, are determined by the war of property, as well as by armed hostilities, by chance, inheritance, alliance or marriage.* But everything is conceived as if it were a war of wealth.* Marriage of one's children and one's position at gatherings are determined solely in the course of the potlatch given and returned. Position is also lost as in war, gambling,* hunting and wrestling.* Sometimes there is no question of receiving return; one destroys simply in order to give the appearance that one has no desire to receive anything back.* Whole cases of candlefish or whale oil,* houses, and blankets by the thousand are burnt; the most valuable coppers are broken and thrown into the sea to level and crush a rival. Progress up the social ladder is made in this way not only for oneself but also for one's family. Thus in a system of this kind much wealth is continually being consumed and transferred. Such transfers may if desired be called exchange or even commerce or sale;* but it is an aristocratic type of commerce characterized by etiquette and generosity; moreover, when it is carried out in a different spirit, for immediate gain, it is viewed with the greatest disdain.*

We see, then, that the notion of honour, strong in Polynesia, and present in Melanesia, is exceptionally marked here. On this point the classical writings made a poor estimate of the motives which animate men and of all that we owe to societies that preceded our own. Even as informed a scholar as Huvelin[13] felt obliged to deduce the notion of honour—which is reputedly *without* efficacy—from the notion of magical efficacy.* The truth is more complex. The notion of honor is no more foreign to these civilizations than the notion of magic.* Polynesian *mana* itself symbolizes not only the magical power of the person but also his honour, and one of the best translations of the word is "authority" or "wealth."* The Tlingit or Haida potlatch consists in considering mutual services as honours.* Even in really primitive societies like the Australian, the "point of honor" is as ticklish as it is in ours; and it may be satisfied by prestations, offerings of food, by precedence or ritual, as well as by gifts.* Men could pledge their honor long before they could sign their names.[14]

[11] Georges Davy (1883–1955) was a member of the *L'Année Sociologique* school and a specialist in the sociology of law. He made extensive use of Mauss' analysis of the potlatch in describing the transition from statute to contractual law.

[12] For Mauss, neither psychology nor economics could explain the vast destruction of property caused by the potlatch or the seemingly illogical behavior of its participants. Instead, he believed that potlatch was about the status of groups, their maintenance of internal cohesion, and their relations with one another.

[13] Paul Huvelin (1873–1924) was a specialist in Roman Law and a member of the law faculty at the University of Lyon. He was a friend of Mauss and an important member of the *L'Année Sociologique* group. Huvelin theorized that the origins of law were magical.

[14] Here, and in other passages, Mauss attacks simplistic understandings of primitive people as morally inferior to Europeans. Although optimistic about the future of civilization, he was highly critical of his own society and, to some degree, romanticized the primitive. In the conclusion to *The Gift,* he wrote, "Hence, we should return to the old and elemental. Once again we shall discover . . . the joy of giving in public, the delight in generous artistic expenditure, the pleasure of hospitality in the public or private feast. . . . We can visualize a society in which these principles obtain. . . . For honour, disinterestedness and corporate solidarity are not vain words, nor do they deny the necessity for work" (1967:67).

The North-West American potlatch has been studied enough as to the form of the contract. But we must find a place for the researches of Davy and Adam in the wider framework of our subject. For the potlatch is more than a legal phenomenon; it is one of those phenomena we propose to call "total." It is religious, mythological and shamanistic because the chiefs taking part are incarnations of gods and ancestors, whose names they bear, whose dances they dance and whose spirits possess them.* It is economic; and one has to assess the value, importance, causes and effects of transactions which are enormous even when reckoned by European standards. The potlatch is also a phenomenon of social morphology; the reunion of tribes, clans, families and nations produces great excitement. People fraternize but at the same time remain strangers; community of interest and opposition are revealed constantly in a great whirl of business.* Finally, from the jural point of view, we have already noted the contractual forms and what we might call the human element of the contract, and the legal status of the contracting parties—as clans or families or with reference to rank or marital condition; and to this we now add that the material objects of the contracts have a virtue of their own which causes them to be given and compels the making of counter-gifts.

It would have been useful, if space had been available, to distinguish four forms of American potlatch: first, potlatch where the phratries and chiefs' families alone take part (Tlingit); second, potlatches in which phratries, clans, families and chiefs take more or less similar roles (Haida); third, potlatch with chiefs and their clans confronting each other (Tsimshian); and fourth, potlatch of chiefs and fraternities (Kwakiutl). But this would prolong our argument, and in any case three of the four forms (with the exception of the Tsimshian) have already been comparatively described by Davy.* But as far as our study is concerned all the forms are more or less identical as regards the elements of the gift, the obligation to receive and the obligation to make a return.

4. THE THREE OBLIGATIONS: GIVING, RECEIVING, REPAYING[15]

THE OBLIGATION TO GIVE

This is the essence of potlatch. A chief must give a potlatch for himself, his son, his son-in-law or daughter* and for the dead.* He can keep his authority in his tribe, village and family, and maintain his position with the chiefs inside and outside his nation,* only if he can prove that he is favorably regarded by the spirits, that he possesses fortune* and that he is possessed by it.* The only way to demonstrate his fortune is by expending it to the humiliation of others, by putting them "in the shadow of his name."* Kwakiutl and Haida noblemen have the same notion of "face" as the Chinese mandarin or officer.* It is said of one of the great mythical chiefs who gave no feast that he had a "rotten face."* The expression is more apt than it is even in China; for to lose one's face is to lose one's spirit, which is truly the "face," the dancing mask, the right to incarnate a spirit and wear an emblem or totem. It is the veritable *persona* which is at stake, and it can be lost in the potlatch* just as it can be lost in the game of gift-giving,* in war,* or through some error in ritual.* In all these societies one is anxious to give; there is no occasion of importance (even outside the solemn winter gatherings) when one is not obliged to invite friends to share the produce of the chase or the forest which the gods or totems have sent;* to redistribute everything received at a potlatch; or to recognize services* from chiefs, vassals or relatives* by means of gifts. Failing these obligations—at least for the nobles—etiquette is violated and rank is lost.*

[15] In this section, Mauss describes what he believes is a fundamental pattern underlying prestations. Since prestations are total social phenomena, this same pattern must also underlie other aspects of society. This insight was of crucial importance in the development of Lévi-Strauss' French structural anthropology (see essays 22 and 23). Lévi-Strauss said, on reading *The Gift,* that his mind was "overcome by the certainty as yet undefinable of assisting in a decisive event in the evolution of science" (quoted in Harris 1968:484).

The obligation to invite is particularly evident between clans or between tribes. It makes sense only if the invitation is given to people other than members of the family, clan or phratry.* Everyone who can, will or does attend the potlatch must be invited.* Neglect has fateful results.* An important Tsimshian myth* shows the state of mind in which the central theme of much European folklore originated: the myth of the bad fairy neglected at a baptism or marriage.[16] Here the institutional fabric in which it is sewn appears clearly, and we realize the kind of civilization in which it functioned. A princess of one of the Tsimshian villages conceives in the "Country of the Otters" and gives birth miraculously to "Little Otter." She returns with her child to the village of her father, the chief. Little Otter catches halibut with which her father feeds all the tribal chiefs. He introduces Little Otter to everyone and requests them not to kill him if they find him fishing in his animal form: "Here is my grandson who has brought for you this food with which I serve you, my guests." Thus the grandfather grows rich with all manner of wealth brought to him by the chiefs when they come in the winter hunger to eat whale and seal and the fresh fish caught by Little Otter. But one chief is not invited. And one day when the crew of a canoe of the neglected tribe meets Little Otter at sea the bowman kills him and takes the seal. The grandfather and all the tribes search high and low for Little Otter until they hear about the neglected tribe. The latter offers its excuses; it has never heard of Little Otter. The princess dies of grief; the involuntarily guilty chief brings the grandfather all sorts of gifts in expiation. The myth ends: "That is why the people have great feasts when a chief's son is born and gets a name; for none may be ignorant of him."* The potlatch—the distribution of goods—is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic and religious. The chief or his son is recognized and acknowledged by the people.

Sometimes the ritual in the feasts of the Kwakiutl and other tribes in the same group expresses this obligation to invite.* Part of the ceremonial opens with the "ceremony of the dogs." These are represented by masked men who come out of one house and force their way into another. They commemorate the occasion on which the people of the three other tribes of Kwakiutl proper neglected to invite the clan which ranked highest among them, the Guetela who, having no desire to remain outsiders, entered the dancing house and destroyed everything.*

THE OBLIGATION TO RECEIVE

This is no less constraining.[17] One does not have the right to refuse a gift or a potlatch.* To do so would show fear of having to reply, and of being abased in default. One would "lose the weight" of one's name by admitting defeat in advance.* In certain circumstances, however, a refusal can be an assertion of victory and invincibility.* It appears at least with the Kwakiutl that a recognized position in the hierarchy, or a victory through previous potlatches, allows one to refuse an invitation or even a gift without war ensuing. If this is so, then a potlatch must be carried out by the man who refuses to accept the invitation. More particularly, he has to contribute to the "fat festival" in which a ritual of refusal may be observed.* The chief who considers himself superior refuses the spoonful of fat offered him: he fetches his copper and returns with it to "extinguish the fire" (of the fat). A series of formalities follow which mark the challenge and oblige the chief who has refused to give another potlatch or fat festival.* In principle, however, gifts are always accepted and praised.* You must speak your appreciation of food prepared for you.* But you

[16] The comparison of the Tsimshian myth with European folklore here presupposes an evolutionary framework. Mauss, like many other social thinkers of the time, saw primitive cultures as living fossils. Given this premise, it followed that current Tsimshian myths were equivalent to ancient European folktales.

[17] Notice that, while Mauss has said that prestations do sometimes serve an economic role, his discussion of potlatch is not economic. Instead, the potlatch is seen as symbolic of social relations between groups, which is why he can say that the obligation to receive is "no less constraining" than the obligation to give.

accept a challenge at the same time.* You receive a gift "on the back." You accept the food and you do so because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy.* When chiefs confront each other in this manner they may find themselves in odd situations and probably they experience them as such. In like manner in ancient Gaul and Germany, as well as nowadays in gatherings of French farmers and students, one is pledged to swallow quantities of liquid to "do honor" in grotesque fashion to the host. The obligation stands even although one is only heir to the man who bears the challenge.* Failure to give or receive,* like failure to make return gifts, means a loss of dignity.*

THE OBLIGATION TO REPAY

Outside pure destruction the obligation to repay is the essence of potlatch.* Destruction is very often sacrificial, directed towards the spirits, and apparently does not require a return unconditionally, especially when it is the work of a superior clan chief or of the chief of a clan already recognized as superior.* But normally the potlatch must be returned with interest like all other gifts. The interest is generally between 30 and 100 per cent a year. If a subject receives a blanket from his chief for a service rendered he will return two on the occasion of a marriage in the chief's family or on the initiation of the chief's son. But then the chief in his turn redistributes to him whatever he gets from the next potlatch at which rival clans repay the chief's generosity.

The obligation of worthy return is imperative.* Face is lost for ever if it is not made or if equivalent value is not destroyed.*

The sanction for the obligation to repay is enslavement for debt. This is so at least for the Kwakiutl, Haida and Tsimshian. It is an institution comparable in nature and function to the Roman *nexum*.[18] The person who cannot return a loan or potlatch loses his rank and even his status of a free man. If among the Kwakiutl a man of poor credit has to borrow he is said to "sell a slave." We need not stress the similarity of this expression with the Roman one.* The Haida say, as if they had invented the Latin phrase independently, that a girl's mother who gives a betrothal payment to the mother of a young chief "puts a thread on him."

Just as the Trobriand *kula* is an extreme case of gift exchange, so the potlatch in North-West America is the monster child of the gift system. In societies of phratries, amongst the Tlingit and Haida, we find important traces of a former total prestation (which is characteristic of the Athabascans, a related group). Presents are exchanged on any pretext for any service, and everything is returned sooner or later for redistribution.* The Tsimshian have almost the same rules.* Among the Kwakiutl these rules, in many cases, function outside the potlatch.* We shall not press this obvious point; old authors described the potlatch in such a way as to make it doubtful whether it was or was not a distinct institution.* We may recall that with the Chinook, one of the least known tribes but one which would repay study, the word "potlatch" means "gift."*

5. THE POWER IN OBJECTS OF EXCHANGE

Our analysis can be carried farther to show that in the things exchanged at a potlatch there is a certain power which forces them to circulate, to be given away and repaid.

To begin with, the Kwakiutl and Tsimshian, and perhaps others, make the same distinction between the various types of property as do the Romans, Trobrianders and Samoans. They have the ordinary articles of consumption and distribution and perhaps also of sale (I have found no trace of barter). They have also the valuable family property—talismans, decorated coppers, skin blankets and embroidered fabrics.* This class of articles is transmitted with that solemnity with which women are given in marriage, privileges are endowed on sons-in-law, and names and status

[18] The *nexum* was a system of contracting a loan in ancient Rome in which the loan was made in the presence of five witnesses. Debtors could be held in bondage for failure to repay.

are given to children and daughters' husbands.* It is wrong to speak here of alienation, for these things are loaned rather than sold and ceded.[19] Basically they are *sacra*[20] which the family parts with, if at all, only with reluctance.

Closer observation reveals similar distinctions among the Haida. This tribe has in fact sacralized, in the manner of Antiquity, the notions of property and wealth.[21] By a religious and mythological effort of a type rare enough in the Americas they have managed to reify an abstraction: the "Property Woman," of whom we possess myths and a description.* She is nothing less than the mother, the founding goddess of the dominant phratry, the Eagles. But oddly enough—a fact which recalls the Asiatic world and Antiquity—she appears identical with the "queen," the principal piece in the game of tip-cat, the piece that wins everything and whose name the Property Woman bears. This goddess is found in Tlingit* country and her myth, if not her cult, among the Tsimshian* and Kwakiutl.*

Together these precious family articles constitute what one might call the magical legacy of the people; they are conceived as such by their owner, by the initiate he gives them to, by the ancestor who endowed the clan with them, and by the founding hero of the clan to whom the spirits gave them.* In any case in all these clans they are spiritual in origin and nature.* Further, they are kept in a large ornate box which itself is endowed with a powerful personality, which speaks, is in communion with the owner, contains his soul, and so on.*

Each of these precious objects and tokens of wealth has, as amongst the Trobrianders, its name,* quality and power.* The large *abalone* shells,* the shields covered with them, the decorated blankets with faces, eyes, and animal and human figures embroidered and woven into them, are all personalities.* The houses and decorated beams are themselves beings.* Everything speaks—roof, fire, carvings and paintings; for the magical house is built not only by the chief and his people and those of the opposing phratry but also by the gods and ancestors; spirits and young initiates are welcomed and cast out by the house in person.*

Each of these precious things has, moreover, a productive capacity within it.* Each, as well as being a sign and surety of life, is also a sign and surety of wealth, a magico-religious guarantee of rank and prosperity.* Ceremonial dishes and spoons decorated and carved with the clan totem or sign of rank, are animate things.* They are replicas of the never ending supply of tools, the creators of food, which the spirits gave to the ancestors. They are supposedly miraculous. Objects are confounded with the spirits who made them, and eating utensils with food. Thus Kwakiutl dishes and Haida spoons are essential goods with a strict circulation and are carefully shared out between the families and clans of the chiefs.

6. MONEY OF RENOWN (RENOMMIERGELD)*

Decorated coppers* are the most important articles in the potlatch, and beliefs and a cult are attached to them. With all these tribes copper, a living being, is the object of cult and myth.* Copper, with the Haida and Kwakiutl at least, is identified with salmon, itself an object of cult.* But in addition to this mythical element each copper is by itself an object of individual belief.* Each principal copper of the families of clan chiefs has its name and individuality;* it has also its own value,* in the full magical and economic sense of the word which is regulated by the vicissitudes of

[19] Mauss' comment on alienation illustrates his insistence that the transactions he describes are not economic—that is, they are not driven by the desire to maximize material profit or minimize loss. Therefore, he believed that the term *alienation* (frequently used by Marxist economists) was not appropriate.

[20] *Sacra:* Latin for objects of devotion.

[21] Durkheim and his followers divided the cultural world into the sacred and profane. Here, Mauss demonstrates the sacred nature of gift-giving. Twenty years later, Lévi-Strauss and his followers emphasized the binary division of sacred and profane employed by *L'Année Sociologique* thinkers, along with the use of binary opposition by structural linguists (see essays 22 and 23).

the potlatches through which it passes and even by its partial or complete destruction.*

Coppers have also a virtue which attracts other coppers to them, as wealth attracts wealth and as dignity attracts honours, spirit-possession and good alliances.* In this way they live their own lives and attract other coppers.* One of the Kwakiutl coppers is called "Bringer of Coppers" and the formula describes how the coppers gather around it, while the name of its owner is "Copper-Flowing-Towards-Me."* With the Haida and Tlingit, coppers are a "fortress" for the princess who owns them; elsewhere a chief who owns them is rendered invincible.* They are the "flat divine objects" of the house.* Often the myth identifies together the spirits who gave the coppers, the owners and the coppers themselves.* It is impossible to discern what makes the power of the one out of the spirit and the wealth of the other; a copper talks and grunts, demanding to be given away or destroyed;* it is covered with blankets to keep it warm just as a chief is smothered in the blankets he is to distribute.*

From another angle we see the transmission of wealth and good fortune.* The spirits and minor spirits of an initiate allow him to own coppers and talismans which then enable him to acquire other coppers, greater wealth, higher rank and more spirits (all of these being equivalents). If we consider the coppers with other forms of wealth which are the object of hoarding and potlatch—masks, talismans and so on—we find they are all confounded in their uses and effects.* Through them rank is obtained; because a man obtains wealth he obtains a spirit which in turn possesses him, enabling him to overcome obstacles heroically. Then later the hero is paid for his shamanistic services, ritual dances and trances. Everything is tied together; things have personality, and personalities are in some manner the permanent possession of the clan. Titles, talismans, coppers and spirits of chiefs are homonyms and synonyms, having the same nature and function.* The circulation of goods follows that of men, women and children, of festival ritual, ceremonies and dances, jokes and injuries. Basically they are the same. If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns "respects" and "courtesies." But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others.[22]

7. PRIMARY CONCLUSION

From our study of four important groups of people we find the following: first, in two or three of the groups, we find the potlatch, its leading motive and its typical form. In all groups we see the archaic form of exchange—the gift and the return gift. Moreover, in these societies we note the circulation of objects side by side with the circulation of persons and rights. We might stop at this point. The amount, distribution and importance of our data authorize us to conceive of a regime embracing a large part of humanity over a long transitional phase, and persisting to this day among peoples other than those described. We may then consider that the spirit of gift exchange is characteristic of societies which have passed the phase of "total prestation" (between clan and clan, family and family) but have not yet reached the stage of pure individual contract, the money market, sale proper, fixed price, and weighed and coined money.[23]

[The Gift, *in its entirety, is a reasonably short essay (only about 80 pages plus extensive notes in the Norton Library edition). The passage you have just*

[22] In this paragraph, Mauss claims that the goods given in potlatch are, in essence, indistinguishable from the people giving them. The goods have personalities and are members of households. Giving them is then spiritually the same as the movement of people from household to household. Twenty five years later, in his first major work, *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (1949) (The Elementary Structures of Kinship), Lévi-Strauss expanded this line of argument by analyzing the exchange of women between groups as a fundamental social phenomenon.

[23] This conclusion points once again to the evolutionary nature of Mauss' thinking.

read is the conclusion of Chapter 2. Chapter 3, titled "Survivals in Early Literature," discusses written evidence for Mauss' theory of gift-giving from ancient Roman law, ancient Hindu legal documents, early Germanic society, and, very briefly, Chinese law. Chapter 4 is titled "Conclusions." The first two sections, which we have excluded here, are moral conclusions and political and economic conclusions. They consist of about 4,750 words and 23 footnotes. We rejoin the text with the sociological and ethical conclusions with which Mauss ends his essay.]

3. SOCIOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONCLUSIONS

We may be permitted another note about the method we have used. We do not set this work up as a model; it simply proffers one or two suggestions. It is incomplete: the analysis could be pushed farther.* We are really posing questions for historians and anthropologists and offering possible lines of research for them rather than resolving a problem and laying down definite answers. It is enough for us to be sure for the moment that we have given sufficient data for such an end.

This being the case, we would point out that there is a heuristic element in our manner of treatment.[24] The facts we have studied are all "total" social phenomena. The word "general" may be preferred although we like it less. Some of the facts presented concern the whole of society and its institutions (as with potlatch, opposing clans, tribes on visit, etc.); others, in which exchanges and contracts are the concern of individuals embrace a large number of institutions.

These phenomena are at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on. They are legal in that they concern individual and collective rights, organized and diffuse morality; they may be entirely obligatory, or subject simply to praise or disapproval. They are at once political and domestic, being of interest both to classes and to clans and families. They are religious; they concern true religion, animism, magic and diffuse religious mentality. They are economic, for the notions of value, utility, interest, luxury, wealth, acquisition, accumulation, consumption and liberal and sumptuous expenditure are all present, although not perhaps in their modern senses. Moreover, these institutions have an important aesthetic side which we have left unstudied; but the dances performed, the songs and shows, the dramatic representations given between camps or partners, the objects made, used, decorated, polished, amassed and transmitted with affection, received with joy, given away in triumph, the feasts in which everyone participates—all these, the food, objects and services, are the source of aesthetic emotions as well as emotions aroused by interest.* This is true not only of Melanesia but also, and particularly, of the potlatch of North-West America and still more true of the market-festival of the Indo-European world. Lastly, our phenomena are clearly morphological. Everything that happens in the course of gatherings, fairs and markets or in the feasts that replace them, presupposes groups whose duration exceeds the season of social concentration, like the winter potlatch of the Kwakiutl or the few weeks of the Melanesian maritime expeditions. Moreover, in order that these meetings may be carried out in peace, there must be roads or water for transport and tribal, inter-tribal or international alliances—*commercium and connubium.**[25]

We are dealing then with something more than a set of themes, more than institutional elements, more than institutions, more even than systems of institutions divisible into legal, economic, religious and other parts. We are concerned with "wholes," with systems in their entirety. We have not described them as if they were fixed, in a static or skeletal condition, and still less have we dissected them into the rules and myths and values and so on of which they are composed. It is only by considering them as wholes that we have been able to see their essence, their operation and their living aspect, and to catch the fleeting moment when the society and its members take emotional stock of themselves and their situation as regards others. Only by making such concrete observation of social life is it possible to come upon facts such as those which our study is beginning to reveal. Nothing in our opinion is more urgent or promising than research into "total" social phenomena.[26]

The advantage is twofold. Firstly there is an advantage in generality, for facts of widespread occurrence are more likely to be universal than local institutions or themes, which are invariably tinged with local color. But particularly the advantage is in realism. We see social facts in the round, as they really are. In society there are not merely ideas and rules, but also men and groups and their behaviours. We see them in motion as an engineer sees masses and systems, or as we observe octopuses and anemones in the sea. We see groups of men, and active forces, submerged in their environments and sentiments.[27]

Historians believe and justly resent the fact that sociologists make too many abstractions and separate unduly the various elements of society.[28] We should follow their precepts and observe what is given. The tangible fact is Rome or Athens or the average Frenchman or the Melanesian of some island, and not prayer or law as such. Whereas formerly sociologists were obliged to analyze and abstract rather too much, they should now force themselves to reconstitute the whole. This is the way to reach incontestable facts. They will also find a way of satisfying psychologists who have a pronounced viewpoint, and particularly psycho-pathologists, since there is no doubt that the object of their study is concrete. They all observe, or at least ought to, minds as wholes and not minds divided into faculties. We should follow suit. The study of the concrete, which is the study of the whole, is made more readily, is more interesting and furnishes more explanations in the sphere of sociology than the study of the abstract. For we observe complete and complex beings. We too describe them in their organisms and *psychai* as well as in their behavior as groups, with the attendant psychoses: sentiments, ideas and desires of the crowd, of organized societies and their sub-groups. We see bodies and their reactions, and their ideas and sentiments as interpretations or as motive forces. The aim and principle of sociology is to observe and understand the whole group in its total behavior.

It is not possible here—it would have meant extending a restricted study unduly—to seek the morphological implications of our facts. It may be worth while, however, to indicate the method one might follow in such a piece of research.

All the societies we have described above with the exception of our European societies are segmentary. Even the Indo-Europeans, the Romans before the Twelve Tables, the Germanic societies up to the *Edda*,[29] and Irish society to the time of its chief literature, were still societies based on

[24] In this paragraph and below, Mauss provides a comprehensive definition of total social phenomena, suggesting that the investigation of such phenomena provides an outstanding pathway for developing an understanding of society in general. Mauss claims that total social phenomena are morphological. That is, they reveal the underlying structure of the groups practicing them.

[25] *Commercium and connubium:* Latin for "commerce and intermarriage."

[26] Here Mauss seems to emphasize the holism that was part of American anthropology of his era, particularly the work of Boas. Mauss cites Boas' work many times in the present article. However, the application of holism to total social phenomena is distinctly his own. Boas and his followers did not believe that total social phenomena existed; they tended to believe that the different aspects of culture were of equal importance.

[27] Mauss relies on Durkheim's idea of a social fact. For Durkheim, sociology was the analysis of social facts. He defines these as "every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations" (see essay 5).

[28] At the turn of the century, academic disciplines were not divided the same way they are today. One of Durkheim's concerns, here echoed by Mauss, was to show that sociology was a discipline with its own area of study and was distinct from history or psychology. The concern of modern anthropologists is frequently the reverse. Recent theorists such as Renato Rosaldo have explored how history and psychology provide fundamental insights into anthropology (see essay 36).

[29] The *Edda* refers to a poetry and prose collection of Norse mythology written in Iceland in the thirteenth century.

the clan or on great families more or less undivided internally and isolated from each other externally. All these were far removed from the degree of unification with which historians have credited them or which is ours today. Within these groups the individuals, even the most influential, were less serious, avaricious and selfish than we are; externally at least they were and are generous and more ready to give. In tribal feasts, in ceremonies of rival clans, allied families or those that assist at each other's initiation, groups visit each other; and with the development of the law of hospitality in more advanced societies, the rules of friendship and the contract are present—along with the gods—to ensure the peace of markets and villages; at these times men meet in a curious frame of mind with exaggerated fear and an equally exaggerated generosity which appear stupid in no one's eyes but our own. In these primitive and archaic societies there is no middle path. There is either complete trust or mistrust. One lays down one's arms, renounces magic and gives everything away, from casual hospitality to one's daughter or one's property. It is in such conditions that men, despite themselves, learnt to renounce what was theirs and made contracts to give and repay.

But then they had no choice in the matter. When two groups of men meet they may move away or in case of mistrust or defiance they may resort to arms; or else they can come to terms. Business has always been done with foreigners, although these might have been allies. The people of Kiriwina said to Malinowski:[30] "The Dobu man is not good as we are. He is fierce, he is a man-eater. When we come to Dobu, we fear him, he might kill us! But see! I spit the charmed ginger root and their mind turns. They lay down their spears, they receive us well."* Nothing better expresses how close together lie festival and warfare.

Thurnwald describes with reference to another Melanesian tribe, with genealogical material, an actual event which shows just as clearly how these people pass in a group quite suddenly from a feast to a battle.* Buleau, a chief, had invited Bobal, another chief, and his people to a feast which was probably to be the first of a long series. Dances were performed all night long. By morning everyone was excited by the sleepless night of song and dance. On a remark made by Buleau one of Bobal's men killed him; and the troop of men massacred and pillaged and ran off with the women of the village. "Buleau and Bobal were more friends than rivals," they said to Thurnwald. We all have experience of events like this.

It is by opposing reason to emotion and setting up the will for peace against rash follies of this kind that peoples succeed in substituting alliance, gift and commerce for war, isolation and stagnation.

The research proposed would have some conclusion of this kind.[31] Societies have progressed in the measure in which they, their sub-groups and their members, have been able to stabilize their contracts and to give, receive and repay. In order to trade, man must first lay down his spear. When that is done he can succeed in exchanging goods and persons not only between clan and clan but between tribe and tribe and nation and nation, and above all between individuals. It is only then that people can create, can satisfy their interests mutually and define them without recourse to arms. It is in this way that the clan, the tribe and nation have learnt—just as in the future the classes and nations and individuals will learn—how to oppose one another without slaughter and to give without sacrificing themselves to others. That is one of the secrets of their wisdom and solidarity.

There is no other course feasible. The *Chronicles of Arthur** relate how King Arthur, with the help of a Cornish carpenter, invented the marvel of his court, the miraculous Round Table at which his knights would never come to blows. Formerly because of jealousy, skirmishes, duels and murders had set blood flowing in the most sumptuous of feasts. The carpenter says to Arthur: "I will make thee a fine table, where sixteen hundred may sit at once, and from which none need be excluded . . . And no knight will be able to raise combat, for there the highly placed will be on the same level as the lowly." There was no "head of the table" and hence no more quarrels. Wherever Arthur took his table, contented and invincible remained his noble company. And this today is the way of the nations that are strong, rich, good and happy. Peoples, classes, families and individuals may become rich, but they will not achieve happiness until they can sit down like the knights around their common riches. There is no need to seek far for goodness and happiness. It is to be found in the imposed peace, in the rhythm of communal and private labor, in wealth amassed and redistributed, in the mutual respect and reciprocal generosity that education can impart.

Thus we see how it is possible under certain circumstances to study total human behavior; and how that concrete study leads not only to a science of manners, a partial social science, but even to ethical conclusions—"civility," or "civics" as we say today. Through studies of this sort we can find, measure and assess the various determinants, aesthetic, moral, religious and economic, and the material and demographic factors, whose sum is the basis of society and constitutes the common life, and whose conscious direction is the supreme art—politics in the Socratic sense of the word.

[30] Mauss refers to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, best known for his work in the Trobriand Islands. We present an extract from Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922)* in essay 11. Richard Thurnwald (1869–1954), mentioned in the next paragraph, led research expeditions to the South Pacific in the early twentieth century. He was the founder of the journal *Sociologus* and a key voice in midcentury German anthropology.

[31] According to Durkheim's ideas about evolution, primitive mechanical solidarity gives way to modern organic solidarity. In this scheme, there is constant progress toward interdependence, and society reaches ever higher levels of integration. Rather than segments of society being opposed to each other in class warfare, as Marxist analysts claim, or engaged in a Malthusian struggle for survival, as Spencerians believed, every part of society should be seen as working for the peace and benefit of the whole.

Although Mauss and Durkheim believed that social evolution would be characterized by a progression of ever better social forms, Mauss' life was tragic. His mentor Durkheim died in 1917. Few of the members of *L'Année Sociologique*, many of whom were his close friends, survived World War I. When *The Gift* was published, in 1925, conditions in Europe were far from stable. These concluding paragraphs to *The Gift* must be read in this context. They are, at the same time, an affirmation of Durkheim's belief in progress and a plea for peace and harmony in the aftermath of war.

7. *Class, Status, Party*

MAX WEBER (1864–1920)

I: ECONOMICALLY DETERMINED POWER AND THE SOCIAL ORDER[a]

Law exists when there is a probability that an order will be upheld by a specific staff of men who will use physical or psychical compulsion with the intention of obtaining conformity with the order, or of inflicting sanctions for infringement of it. The structure of every legal order directly influences the distribution of power, economic or otherwise, within its respective community. This is true of all legal orders and not only that of the state. In general, we understand by "power" the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.[1]

From *Economy and Society* (1922)

[1] This essay was part of Weber's massive posthumous work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Economy and Society)*. Probably written between 1915 and 1920, it was first published in 1922. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was one volume of an extensive series of studies in the social sciences that Weber organized for the German publishing house Siebeck. Much of Weber's work was written in response to Karl Marx (see essay 4), and the relationship between the