

Comparative Studies in Society and History 2007:49(2):1–13.
0010-4175/07 \$9.50 © 2007 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History
DOI: 10.1017/S0010417507000564

Marcel Mauss: In Pursuit of the Whole. *A Review Essay*

KEITH HART

Anthropology, Goldsmiths University of London

Emile Durkheim assembled a team to promote his vision for sociology, but he and Mauss were in many ways a double act, like Marx and Engels. There was room for only one leader of the movement, so we speak of the Durkheimians and the Marxists. Mauss and Engels each assumed leadership of the movement they jointly founded after their partner's death, but the intrinsic inequality of the partnership was made worse in Mauss' case by age difference, kinship seniority, and his inability to write books of his own. The publication of an abridged English translation of Marcel Fournier's *Marcel Mauss: A Biography* (2006 [1994]) allows us to reconsider his historical relationship with Durkheim, as well as his legacy for anthropology, history, and the social sciences today. French scholarship on Mauss is, of course, much more advanced than its Anglophone counterpart and it is less confined to academic anthropology. Fournier's 800-page collection of Mauss' *Écrits politiques* (1997) remains virtually unknown to English-speakers and the collective organized in his name, the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* (with its journal, *revue de MAUSS*), continues the eponymous founder's commitment to integrating progressive politics and intellectual work over a wide range of issues. In both cases, *The Gift* (1990 [1925]) has iconic significance as Mauss' most discussed work; but, as Sigaud (2002) has already pointed out, the Anglophone academy, with assistance from one or two leading French anthropologists, has taken up its message in ways that depart seriously from the author's original intentions.

This short review essay accordingly has two parts. In the first, I will outline a schematic trajectory of Mauss' life, conceived of first as Durkheim's junior partner and afterwards as himself. The initial phase lasted from 1895, when Mauss entered academic employment as an *agrégé* in philosophy aged twenty-three, to the outbreak of war in 1914. This was followed by a decade of great

Acknowledgments: Email: keith@thememorybank.co.uk. Website: www.thememorybank.co.uk. I am grateful to Philippe Steiner for his comments and additional references; and to David Akin as editor and friend.

44 personal fulfillment, first in military service and afterwards as the leader of
 45 his uncle's cause, following Durkheim's premature death in 1917. Mauss now
 46 flourished as a political journalist, while redefining his main academic interest
 47 as the relationship between socialism and the nation. The years 1920–1925
 48 account for fully two-thirds of the political writings assembled by Fournier.
 49 They culminated in the foundation of the *Institut d'Ethnologie* with Mauss at
 50 its head and, not coincidentally, in the publication of *The Gift*. Mauss lived
 51 another twenty-five years after that. He achieved considerable renown as a
 52 teacher and public figure, managing to be acknowledged both as Durkheim's
 53 heir as a professor of sociology in the *Collège de France* and as the guru for
 54 a new school of ethnographers. His political engagements waned in this
 55 period and his academic publications even more so. His last decade was a
 56 sad one, when he was first forced to withdraw as a Jew in German-occupied
 57 Paris and then was more or less abandoned by people who later claimed to
 58 lionize him. He died in 1950 in his late seventies.

59 The second part of this essay considers “The Strange History of *The Gift*.”
 60 My aim here is to show that the essay's prominence in contemporary anthro-
 61 pological discourse owes almost nothing to Mauss' agenda in writing it. This
 62 is because his political program, articulated so fully in the same period, has
 63 dropped out of sight, being replaced by the star-struck concerns of an academic
 64 elite. But it has to be acknowledged that his text is in some ways rather obscure,
 65 permitting a variety of interpretations. It was also a vehicle for Mauss to assert
 66 himself against Durkheim's sociological reductionism in pursuit not only of an
 67 integrated intellectual politics, but also of an opening up to the full complexity
 68 of human existence which he summarized in the rather mystical phrase “total
 69 social fact.” This message was hard to understand at the time—as his long-term
 70 collaborator, Henri Hubert, told him—but is even more so in our age of
 71 academic bureaucracy and specialization. I conclude that Mauss' value for us
 72 today lies in his attempt to integrate politics and intellectual life in the heady
 73 years after the First World War, of which *The Gift* was one enigmatic
 74 outcome (cf. Godelier 1999).

75 Marcel Fournier's achievement as Mauss' biographer and archivist is hard to
 76 overstate. Without his patient labors, Mauss would be even more the creature of
 77 myth and legend than he is. A Montreal sociologist, Fournier describes this as
 78 an intellectual biography, yet his treatment of the main texts is rather cursory
 79 and much concerning Mauss' central ideas remains opaque. For example, we
 80 learn that he was a methodological tiger, often attacking authors in his countless
 81 book reviews for their errors in this regard. Yet readers of this book would be
 82 excused for wondering what Mauss' methods actually were. Instead, what we
 83 get is a very rich account of Mauss' social life and relationships. This balance
 84 is appropriate, since the protagonist occasionally expressed doubts about the
 85 intellectual life and his uncle, for one, sometimes wondered if he was more
 86 suited to café society than to hard academic work. Reflecting his own

87 personality rather than Durkheim's, Mauss kept pushing for a more concrete
 88 and complex approach to studying the human condition than the modern
 89 social sciences allow for. He supervised a revolution in French anthropology
 90 that he was never able to participate in directly, while the sociology he pro-
 91 fessed came under acute pressure during the interwar years. Marcel Mauss'
 92 own life is the "total social fact" whose meaning he sought to illuminate and
 93 which we have to excavate. Even his apparent failures offer us much opportu-
 94 nity for reflection. While the twentieth century denied his enterprise at every
 95 turn, he sought a method for placing the whole person in society as a whole.

96
 97 A LIFE IN THREE STAGES

98
 99 *1. 1895–1914*

100 Émile Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*, a version of his doctoral
 101 thesis written while teaching at Bordeaux, was published in 1893. It provided
 102 a template for the school of sociology he sought to found and his nephew,
 103 Marcel Mauss, was still addressing its central concerns more than thirty
 104 years later, when he wrote *The Gift*. The idea of economic progress through
 105 specialization was at the core of the British economics founded by Adam
 106 Smith (1776). A century later economic individualism was the cornerstone
 107 of an evolutionary social theory articulated by Herbert Spencer (1897) and
 108 popularized as the native ideology of a triumphant western bourgeoisie. Dur-
 109 kheim sought to show that division was a dialectical process of separation
 110 and integration, that society became stronger as labor was divided and as the
 111 scope for individual action was enhanced. Emphasis on the making of individ-
 112 ual contracts obscured the social glue of "the non-contractual element in the
 113 contract" that made the economy possible—a combination of law, state,
 114 customs, morality, and shared history that it was the sociologist's task to
 115 make more visible. The individual is the result of social development and
 116 not, as in Smith's origin myth, its source.

117 Durkheim's aim, in a socialist tradition begun by Saint-Simon, was to
 118 uncover the sources of solidarity, of which he identified two main types: mech-
 119 anical and organic. The first was grounded in the sameness of "primitive" or
 120 stateless societies and was expressed as a *conscience collective*, while the
 121 second arose from higher levels of interdependence in economies whose differ-
 122 entiation obscured common interests. Modern nations draw on a culture of
 123 sameness while organizing a complex division of labor. Durkheim hoped to
 124 promote the stability of the French Third Republic through a syndicalist politics
 125 (the professional association of occupational groups) that was antagonistic to
 126 class-based socialism. Above all he hoped to nurture the development of a
 127 secular science of ethics to replace the traditional mixture of religious and
 128 class prejudice. Following the academic trend of the day in fields such as chem-
 129 istry, he aimed to establish an exclusive and reductionist method for sociology

130 and, in the following years, before moving to a more central base in Paris, he
 131 did so with the publication of two books: *Rules of the Sociological Method*
 132 (1895) and *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897).

133 Marcel Mauss came from the same Jewish family of small embroidery man-
 134 ufacturers in the Vosges region of Eastern France, Durkheim being his mother's
 135 brother and fourteen years his senior. His academic training was in philosophy,
 136 philology, and the history of religions, with a strong emphasis on ancient
 137 languages. When qualified to teach, he joined the section of religious science
 138 at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and took up a chair there in the reli-
 139 gions of uncivilized peoples in 1901 when he was twenty-nine ("there are no
 140 uncivilized peoples," he said). The decades around the turn of the century
 141 were the heyday of a new scientific approach to the study of religion in
 142 France, being a time of anti-Semitism (the Dreyfus affair) and the separation
 143 of church and state in education. Religion was the precursor of the kind of
 144 secular republican morality that Mauss and his uncle wished to promote as a
 145 middle way between bourgeois individualism and communist revolution.

146 Mauss wanted to discover the elementary forms of religion through studying
 147 the ancient Indo-European texts and the new ethnography of primitive peoples
 148 coming out of Australia, Oceania, and Africa. He chose prayer or oral ritual as
 149 the subject of his doctoral thesis, for the interesting reason that speech is the
 150 unity of thinking and action. But his first major publication was a collaboration
 151 with his historian friend, Henri Hubert, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*
 152 (1968 [1898]), an attempt, focusing on Hinduism and Judaism, to place the
 153 individual at the centre of the collectivity through communion with the
 154 sacred. Many of Mauss' abiding themes are to be found here—contract, atone-
 155 ment, punishment, the gift, the soul, etcetera. The essay was published in *Année*
 156 *Sociologique*, Durkheim's ambitious review of new work in sociology for
 157 which Mauss was in effect the co-editor. In sixteen years (1898–1913),
 158 he reviewed and summarized hundreds of books and articles, producing
 159 a quarter of the 10,000 octavo pages published. He was responsible for the
 160 religious sociology section, which Durkheim admitted had "a sort of primacy."
 161 Uncle and nephew collaborated in "On some Primitive Forms of Classification"
 162 (1967 [1903]), an audacious attempt to reduce the categories of understanding
 163 to social morphology, for which Mauss dryly remarked, "I provided the facts."
 164 Mauss could thus be said to have been Durkheim's full partner in an engage-
 165 ment with religion and philosophy that culminated in the latter's supreme
 166 achievement, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965 [1912])
 167 (See also Besnard, Durkheim, and Fournier 1998; Tarot 1999). Certainly
 168 they drew on the same Australian ethnography; but Mauss never completed
 169 his own book on prayer, interrupting work on it in 1909 despite having
 170 written 120 pages. (An English version of *On Prayer* came out in 2003.)

171 Mauss actively embraced socialist party politics, maintaining an affiliation to
 172 the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO). He was a founder of

173 and contributor to the journal, *Mouvement Socialiste*, and wrote regularly for
 174 the left-wing press—first for *Humanité* and later for *Populaire*, his party news-
 175 paper. He was committed to voluntarism and to social action, being heavily
 176 involved in the cooperative movement; indeed, he lost 10,000 francs in spon-
 177 soring a cooperative bakery, *La Boulangerie*. He openly embraced an
 178 anti-capitalist ideology, believing, unlike Durkheim, that only the working
 179 class could lead society to a more universal form. He never sought to separate
 180 his scientific work from politics and this led to some tension between them,
 181 especially since Durkheim was able to link this trait to his nephew's inability
 182 to settle down (he remained a bachelor and something of a socialite) and to
 183 follow through on his major writing projects. Mauss' rejection as a candidate
 184 for a chair in the *Collège de France* in 1908 brought much of this to a head.

185 2. 1914–1925

186
 187 In the run-up to the First World War, Mauss embraced pacifism and internation-
 188 alism, but, when it broke out, he signed up with some alacrity, serving for four
 189 years as an interpreter with British and Australian troops, for the most part on
 190 the front line. Military service was a liberation for him from the academic drud-
 191 gery of being Durkheim's second-in-command. "I'm doing wonderfully. I just
 192 wasn't made for the intellectual life and I am enjoying the life war is giving me"
 193 (Fournier 2006: 175). Of course, long before the end, he and everyone else
 194 became fed up with the reality of the war. While still on active service, he
 195 started writing a book, unencumbered with footnotes, "On Politics"; but, like
 196 every other similar project, it remained unfinished. In 1919, he returned to
 197 Paris and his old job at the *École Pratique*, heavily decorated and in the
 198 novel situation of being his own man at last. Durkheim lost his only son
 199 André in 1915 and died of grief two years later without having yet reached
 200 sixty. Even Mauss' friends told him that now was the time for him to grow
 201 up, and he accepted responsibility for leadership of what was left of the team
 202 Durkheim had brought together. He entered the years 1920–1925 full of
 203 energy for politics and intellectual life, with a greater emphasis on the
 204 former. It was without doubt the high point of his career and its main academic
 205 outcome was the "Essai sur le don" (1950a [1925]).

206 Mauss wrote scores of articles for political publications in this period—
 207 especially for *La vie socialiste*, *Action coopérative*, and *Populaire*. His intellec-
 208 tual energies were focused on the nationalization of socialism and he began a
 209 book on "The Nation" that remained his dominant writing project for the next
 210 two decades (Mauss 1953 [1920]; 2006: 41–48). He was much taken with
 211 English versions of socialism, not just the Rochdale Pioneers of his beloved
 212 cooperative movement, but also the Fabians, especially Sidney and Beatrice
 213 Webb, for whom nationalization of the means of production was a priority.
 214 Mauss returned to internationalism after the war and was pleased that Durkheim's
 215 idea of the division of labor was now being applied between societies as

216 well as within them. Like everyone else, he had to take a position on the
 217 Bolshevik revolution and its aftermath; and he did so while drawing explicitly
 218 on sociological method. He was highly critical of the Bolsheviks' coercive
 219 resort to violence, especially against the most active classes, and of their destruc-
 220 tion of the market economy along with all the confidence and good faith it
 221 represented. He advocated an "economic movement from below," in the form
 222 of syndicalism, cooperation, and mutual insurance. His greatest hopes were
 223 for a consumer democracy driven by the cooperative movement. He even
 224 enjoyed a brief period as a financial commentator on the exchange-rate crisis
 225 of 1922 and argued, "economic revolutions are always monetary." His ethics
 226 were based on "gentleness and legalism," his politics on the need to add
 227 economic self-organization to juridical socialism. He was increasingly
 228 fascinated by the national variations in socialist practice emerging at this
 229 time. Mauss also edited for publication his uncle's lectures on socialism in
 230 the tradition of Saint-Simon (1958 [1928]).

231 In all this time, Mauss continued his academic career at the *École Pratique's*
 232 section of religious science. His researches were no longer focused on the
 233 elementary forms of religion, but rather on the political sociology of the
 234 post-war period—nationalism, socialism, and the Bolshevik revolution. He
 235 revived the *Année Sociologique*, but the journal soon failed for lack of the com-
 236 mitted manpower Durkheim was able to mobilize in its heyday (principally his
 237 own and his nephew's). In the early 1920s, he began to take an interest in the
 238 potlatch reported for America's Northwest Coast by Boas and his colleagues.
 239 This was amplified by the publication of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the*
 240 *Western Pacific* (1961 [1922]), confirming Mauss' view that the potlatch was
 241 a common feature of Melanesian societies. He read the ancient Indo-European
 242 sources for analogous phenomena; and we may recall that his essay with Hubert
 243 on sacrifice was also in part about the gift.

244 The result was the "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les
 245 sociétés archaïques," published in the first volume of the new series of *Année*
 246 *Sociologique* (1925), a medium-length tract with over 500 footnotes and a
 247 hundred references, but still offered as a preliminary report on ongoing inqui-
 248 ries. Along with his incipient interest in joking relationships, this essay was
 249 intended to "...counter the Durkheimian image of a society functioning as a
 250 'homogenous mass' with the image of a more complex collectivity, groups
 251 and subgroups that overlap, intersect and fuse together" (Fournier 2006: 245).

252 3. 1925–1950

254 In the same year, the *Institut d'Ethnologie* was founded in the university with a
 255 remit to train professional ethnologists and offer support to amateur inquiries in
 256 the colonies. Mauss took his place in the Institute's leadership along with
 257 Lévy-Bruhl and Rivet. Not long afterwards, despite an unexpectedly close
 258 fight, he won a chair in sociology at the *Collège de France*. Sociology was

259 under considerable pressure at this time, as witnessed by *Année Sociologique*'s
 260 failure; but Mauss won great renown in his twin capacity as Durkheim's heir
 261 and as the *de facto* guru of the new discipline of ethnology. Apart from a
 262 very brief sojourn in Morocco, Mauss did no fieldwork, but he was an engaging
 263 teacher with a dialectical style of improvisation who had plenty of time for café
 264 conversation with his students. He had his detractors still: a rival for Rockefeller
 265 patronage dismissed Mauss as "essentially a politician who produces
 266 nothing on his own." And it is true that much of his effort was devoted to pub-
 267 lishing the posthumous work of former friends and colleagues, including Henri
 268 Hubert, Robert Hertz, and Émile Durkheim. In *The Gift*, he acknowledged the
 269 validity of criticisms by historians and others that social scientists tend to
 270 abstract too much and proposed instead to address the full complexity of "indi-
 271 viduals in their moral, social, mental and above all corporeal and material integ-
 272 rity" (Fourmier 2006: 240). Consistent with this anti-reductionist stance, his two
 273 major publications before retirement were essays on "the person" (Mauss
 274 1950b [1935]; 1985 [1935]) and "techniques of the body" (Mauss 1950c
 275 [1938]; 2006: 77–95), opening up sociology to technology, psychology, and
 276 the humanities in general.

277 Mauss married his secretary in 1934 and she was soon bedridden after an
 278 incident involving poisonous gas. He suffered a prolonged sequence of per-
 279 sonal bereavements throughout the second half of his life; and was forced
 280 out of his job and spacious apartment by the German occupation of Paris
 281 (but escaped being sent to Buchenwald). After the war, he remained socially
 282 isolated and eventually, before his death in 1950, his mind began to give
 283 way. A new school of French ethnographers was happy to claim him as their
 284 inspiration, and his international reputation, which was already considerable,
 285 has continued to grow ever since. In the same year as his death, Claude
 286 Lévi-Strauss (1950), on the invitation of Georges Gurvitch, edited and intro-
 287 duced a collection of his principal essays (*Marcel Mauss: Sociologie et anthro-
 288 pologie*), Mauss' first and only book-length publication. Despite ongoing
 289 evidence that these essays have not been closely read by the bulk of anthropol-
 290 ogists outside France, Mauss' reputation as a founder of the modern discipline
 291 appears to be secure; and every undergraduate student of anthropology in the
 292 world at least pays lip service to having read *The Gift*.

293 THE STRANGE HISTORY OF *THE GIFT*

295 Mauss' essay on *The Gift* is offered as a provisional fragment of a more com-
 296 prehensive study (which never appeared). At one level, this could be taken as
 297 just another example of the author's style. But I would suggest that the essay's
 298 greatness lies in Mauss' aspiration to embrace the human condition in its
 299 entirety by exploring the moral relationship between concrete persons and
 300 society as a whole, a heroic aspiration that is bound to fail. The French
 301 words he uses are *totalité* and *intégrité*, which have their direct analogues in

302 the Latin register of English. Moreover, he claims that this wholeness is better
 303 approached through concrete description, in the manner of the humanities,
 304 rather than as scientific abstraction.

305 His method is eclectic and encyclopedic, relying on knowledge of numerous
 306 languages, dead and extant, in the manner of the great classical philologists.
 307 But Mauss claims that his is a controlled comparison, drawing on selected eth-
 308 nographic phenomena of Polynesia, Melanesia, and the American Northwest,
 309 plus western legal traditions as revealed by documentary sources, while
 310 seeking always to preserve local color and the original context. The argument
 311 is inevitably only a partial realization of such an ambitious project and is often
 312 obscured by an accumulation of detail. Mauss provides extended conclusions
 313 on the relevance of his study for contemporary societies, but these do not
 314 include even a summary account of prevailing economic and legal institutions,
 315 so that the reader is forced to make numerous imaginative leaps in order to keep
 316 up with the author. Fortunately for Mauss, his essay has encouraged many to
 317 join him in this enterprise, but he must be held partly responsible for the
 318 wide range of interpretations that have subsequently emerged.

319 *The Gift* is in a direct line of descent from Durkheim's *The Division of Labor*
 320 *in Society*, published over three decades before. Following Durkheim's empha-
 321 sis on the non-contractual element of the contract in his critique of Spencer's
 322 utilitarianism (Chapter 7 of the book), this essay is focused explicitly on that
 323 issue. Mauss summarily eliminates the two utilitarian ideologies that purport
 324 to account for the evolution of contracts: "natural economy," Smith's idea
 325 that individual barter was aboriginal; and the notion that primitive communities
 326 were altruistic, giving way eventually to our own regrettably selfish, but more
 327 efficient individualism. Against the contemporary move to replace markets
 328 with communist states, he insists that the complex interplay between individual
 329 freedom and social obligation is synonymous with the human condition and
 330 that markets and money are universal, if not in their current impersonal
 331 form. In this way he fleshes out his uncle's social agenda, but also questions
 332 the accuracy of his model of mechanical solidarity for stateless societies.

333 Mauss' key term for the range of archaic contracts he intends to investigate is
 334 untranslatable into English and something of a feudal relic in French. *Presta-*
 335 *tion* is a service performed out of obligation, something like "community
 336 service" as an alternative to imprisonment. According to him, the earliest
 337 forms of exchange took place between entire social groups and involved the
 338 whole range of things people can do for each other, a stage he called the
 339 *système des prestations totales*. But his main interest is in a form that probably
 340 evolved from this, named after the Northwest Coast example as "potlatch,"
 341 which he considers to be general in Melanesia and Oceania, where his chief
 342 examples are the *kula* ring (Malinowski 1961 [1922]) and the Maori. Exca-
 343 vation of classical sources reveals analogous phenomena in Thrace and possi-
 344 bly Germany. These forms of gift-exchange involve aggressive competition

345 between the individual leaders of groups, which he labels *prestations totales de*
 346 *type agonistique*.

347 As is well known, Mauss' guiding question is: "What is the principle of right
 348 and interest in backward or archaic societies that makes it obligatory to return a
 349 present one has received? What force is there in the thing given that makes the
 350 recipient give something back?" (1950a: 148, my translation). He rarely refers
 351 to this process of giving and making a return as "reciprocity." His answer,
 352 broadly speaking, is that human beings everywhere find the personal character
 353 of the gift compelling and are especially susceptible to its evocation of the most
 354 diffuse social and spiritual ties. Potlatches provide a clear instance of this prin-
 355 ciple in action. Mauss goes on to trace its appearance in sacrifice (*do ut des*), in
 356 early Roman law and in the Germanic *wadium*, even in the apparently negative
 357 instance of alms-giving, where the recipient is assumed to be incapable of
 358 making a return except in the form of spiritual deference. A lot of ink has
 359 subsequently been spilled on this part of the argument.

360 Mauss' concluding chapter addresses the relevance of all this for contempo-
 361 rary societies without offering an explicit analysis of capitalist markets (which
 362 we are all supposed to know about). There are three sections: 1. *Conclusions de*
 363 *morale*; 2. *Conclusions de sociologie économique et d'économie politique*;
 364 3. *Conclusion de sociologie générale et de morale*. The logic of the structure
 365 is that Mauss will consider first "moral" questions and then the economy,
 366 returning to morality in the context of sociological method more generally.
 367 The difficult term for us is *morale* which in the first instance clearly refers to
 368 the science of ethics that Durkheim aimed for in the *Division of Labor*, but
 369 in the latter case it probably means more generally the human aspiration to
 370 place relations between person and society on a just footing of shared morality.

371 Mauss' chief ethical conclusion is that the attempt to create a free market for
 372 private contracts is utopian and just as unrealizable as its antithesis, a collective
 373 based solely on altruism. Human institutions everywhere are founded on the
 374 unity of individual and society, freedom and obligation, self-interest and
 375 concern for others. Modern capitalism rests on an unsustainable attachment
 376 to one of these poles and it will take a social revolution to restore a humane
 377 balance. If we were not blinded by ideology, we would recognize that the
 378 system of *prestations* survives in our societies—in weddings and at Christmas,
 379 in friendly societies and more bureaucratic forms of insurance, even in wage
 380 contracts and the welfare state. With regard to the economy, Mauss, who had
 381 earlier insisted that the *kula* valuables are money, if not of the sort we are fam-
 382 ilar with, takes Malinowski to task for reproducing in his typology of trans-
 383 actions the ideological opposition between commercial self-interest and the
 384 free gift. The economic movement from below that he advocated in his political
 385 journalism—professional associations, cooperatives, mutual insurance—is a
 386 secular version of what can be found in the religions of archaic societies, as
 387 well as in the central phenomena described here. These are all *faits sociaux*

388 *totaux*, total social facts, in the sense that they bring into play the whole of
 389 society and all its institutions—legal, economic, religious, and aesthetic. And
 390 this is the challenge they pose for sociological method.

391 Mauss claims that he has studied these societies in their dynamic integrity,
 392 not as congealed states to be decomposed into analytical instances of rules
 393 pertaining to law, myth, or value and price: “By considering the whole together,
 394 we have been able to perceive the essential, the movement of everything, the
 395 live dimension, the fleeting moment when society or rather men become
 396 aware of the common feelings they have for themselves and others. This con-
 397 crete observation of social life gives us the means of discovering new facts that
 398 we are just beginning to glimpse. Nothing, in our opinion, is more urgent and
 399 fruitful than this study of social facts” (1950: 275–76, my translation).

400 We must follow the example of the historians and observe what is given,
 401 rather than split up social phenomena into separate abstractions. The reality
 402 is always a concrete person acting in society—“the middle-class Frenchman,
 403 the Melanesian of this or that island” (1950: 274). Then sociologists will
 404 furnish psychologists with material they can use, while maintaining their dis-
 405 tinctive pursuit of the social whole and of group behavior as a whole. This is
 406 Marcel Mauss’ manifesto for how he will carry forward his uncle’s academic
 407 legacy. In some ways it entails the inversion of Durkheim’s reductionist
 408 program for social science. It is therefore unsurprising that he is now con-
 409 sidered to be a founder of modern anthropology more than a sociologist.

410 Lygia Sigaud (2002) has provided a trenchant account of *The Gift*’s sub-
 411 sequent trajectory in twentieth-century anthropology which I will just summar-
 412 ize briefly here. She argues that the essay became famous only in the second
 413 half of the last century and then in a distorted version that privileged economic
 414 exchange to the detriment of Mauss’ other concerns. The chief culprit is
 415 Lévi-Strauss (1950), whose introduction to the collected essays was designed
 416 to harness Mauss’ reputation to his own theory of reciprocity as previously
 417 published in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969 [1949]). But *The*
 418 *Gift* really took off as a staple of Anglophone anthropological discourse follow-
 419 ing Sahlins (1974) article, “The Spirit of the Gift,” which entrenched
 420 Lévi-Strauss’ claim that Mauss’ essay hinged on a faulty understanding of
 421 the Maori concept of *hau*. She notes that the opposition between “commodity
 422 economy” (the West) and “gift economy” (the Rest) began to take root after
 423 1980; and she identifies this trend with Carrier (1995) who sought to subvert
 424 it, while characterizing the dichotomy as “Maussian Occidentalism.” We
 425 could add that this is the period of neo-liberalism.

426 Sigaud makes no connection between Mauss’ essay and his political com-
 427 mitments. The trajectory she describes is a purely academic one. As a result,
 428 when trying to account for the remarkable discontinuity between what Mauss
 429 wrote and what he is now thought to have written, she relies for explanation
 430 on the cult of personality and the power of gossip in small-scale oral

431 communities such as academic anthropology. In fact, Chris Gregory launched
 432 the modern trend with his book, *Gifts and Commodities* (1982), even though, as
 433 he states in *Savage Money*,

434 I have never used the distinction between gifts and commodities to classify societies nor
 435 have I ever suggested that ‘we’ are to commodities as ‘they’ are to gifts. Such an
 436 approach is anathema to me. My problem in *Gifts and Commodities* was to explain
 437 the paradox, brought about by colonization, of the efflorescence of gift exchange in a
 438 world dominated by commodity production and exchange. I characterized Papua New
 439 Guinea as an ‘ambiguous’ economy where things are now gifts, now commodities,
 440 depending on the social context (1982: 117). Thus I developed the logical opposition
 441 between gifts and commodities in order to try to understand the ambiguity of the histori-
 442 cally specific situation of colonial Papua New Guinea (. . .) Ethnographic classification
 443 is quite distinct from conceptual division by the logical principle of dichotomy (1997:
 47–49).

444 But it did no good. The “fictions” employed ingeniously by Marilyn Strathern
 445 (1988) in *The Gender of the Gift*—that “we” (the West or “Euroamerica”) are
 446 opposed to “them” (the Rest or “Melanesia”), and that the gift is the conceptual
 447 opposite of the commodity in some linked way—are now routinely reproduced
 448 in introductory anthropology courses everywhere. Mauss’ text is adduced in
 449 support of this notion, even though it is the very ideology his essay was
 450 intended to refute. But then who reads anything closely these days?

451 The French literature is, for obvious reasons, much more respectful of
 452 Mauss’ actual rather than his invented legacy (Godbout and Caillé 2000;
 453 Godelier 1999). There are honorable exceptions in the English-speaking
 454 tradition, among whom I would include myself (Hart 2000: 191–96). Jonathan
 455 Parry’s (1986) article also argues correctly that the purely altruistic gift was for
 456 Mauss the inverse of the market conceived of as a sphere of pure self-interest,
 457 whereas the archaic gift was a mixture of the two; so that market ideology
 458 leads us to think of Christmas presents as pure gifts, an idea that we then
 459 project onto our reading of Mauss’ text. But chief among the exceptions must
 460 be counted David Graeber (2001:151–228), who offers a full-length reanalysis
 461 of *The Gift*, complete with detailed attribution of Mauss’ socialist views and
 462 acknowledgment of the continuation of his intellectual politics by the MAUSS
 463 group, among others. It will be interesting to see if this long chapter makes
 464 any difference to the wholesale adoption of bourgeois ideology by Anglophone
 465 anthropologists who affect disaffection from it, while imagining that Mauss was
 466 as opposed to the market as they claim to be, at least in their classrooms.

467 It cannot be said that Marcel Fournier’s biography of Mauss makes the
 468 latter’s ideas more transparent than they were already. But he does show us
 469 that his protagonist’s political engagement is indispensable to understanding
 470 his academic production. Moreover, his account of the life should be the base-
 471 line for all future judgment of Mauss’ intellectual significance. I believe that the
 472 academic division of labor that shapes contemporary anthropology has passed
 473 its sell-by date. Mauss already felt so eighty years ago. When we come to

474 consider how anthropology might contribute to the formation of a more just
 475 world society, Mauss' example will be even more influential than at present.
 476 In the meantime, his most famous work is generally seen upside down
 477 through "the *camera obscura* of ideology" (Marx).
 478

REFERENCES

- 480 Besnard, P., Durkheim, E. and Fournier, M. 1998. *Lettres à Marcel Mauss*. Paris: PUF.
 481 Carrier, J. 1995. Maussian Occidentalism: Gift and Commodity Systems. In *Occident-*
 482 *alism: Images of the West*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
 483 Durkheim, E. 1958 [1928]. *Socialism and Saint-Simon (Le Socialisme)*. Yellow Springs,
 484 Oh.: Antioch Press.
 485 ———. 1960 [1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Glencoe, Ill. Free Press.
 486 ———. 1964 [1895]. *Rules of the Sociological Method*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press.
 487 ———. 1965 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free
 488 Press.
 489 ———. 1966 [1897]. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press.
 490 Durkheim, E. and Mauss, M 1967 [1903]. *Primitive Classification*. Chicago: University
 491 of Chicago Press.
 492 Fournier, M. 2006 [1994]. *Marcel Mauss: A Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University
 493 Press. 1994. *Marcel Mauss*. Paris: Fayard
 494 Godbout, J. and Caillé, A. 2000 [1992]. *The World of the Gift*. Montreal: McGill-Queens
 495 University Press.
 496 Godelier, M. 1999 [1996]. *The Enigma of the Gift*. Chicago: University of Chicago
 497 Press.
 498 Graeber, D. 2001. *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our*
 499 *Own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave.
 500 Gregory, C. 1982. *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press.
 501 ———. 1997. *Savage Money: The Anthropology and Politics of Commodity Exchange*.
 502 Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
 503 Hart, K. 2000. *The Memory Bank: Money in an Unequal World*. London: Profile.
 504 Hubert, H. and Mauss, M. 1968 [1898]. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*. Chicago:
 505 University of Chicago Press.
 506 Lévi-Strauss, C. 1969 [1949]. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon
 507 Press.
 508 ———. 1950. Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss. In *Marcel Mauss: Sociologie et*
 509 *anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, ix–lii.
 510 Malinowski, B. 1961 [1922]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native*
 511 *Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*.
 512 New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
 513 Mauss, M. 1950a [1925]. Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés
 514 archaïques. In *Sociologie et anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France,
 515 143–279.
 516 ———. 1950b [1935]. Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: La notion de personne, celle
 517 de 'moi.' In *Sociologie et anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France,
 518 331–62.
 519 ———. 1950c [1938]. Les techniques du corps. In *Sociologie et anthropologie*. Paris:
 520 Presses Universitaires de France, 363–86.
 521 ———. 1953 [1920]. La nation. *Année Sociologique* (3d series) 3: 7–68.
 522 ———. 1985 [1935]. A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of the Person; the
 523 Notion of Self. In, M. Carrithers, S. Collins, and S. Lukes, eds., *The Category of*

- 517 *the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
518 Press, 1–25.
- 519 ———. 1990 [1925]. *The Gift: Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*.
520 London: Routledge.
- 521 ———. 1997. *Écrits politiques*. M. Fournier, ed. Paris: Fayard.
- 522 ———. 2003. *On Prayer*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- 523 ———. 2006. *Techniques, Technology and Civilization*. N. Schlanger, ed. New York:
524 Berghahn.
- 525 Parry, J. 1986. The Gift, the Indian Gift and the ‘Indian Gift.’ *Man* 21, 3: 453–73.
- 526 Sahlins, M. 1974 [1972]. The Spirit of the Gift. In *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago:
527 Aldine Atherton.
- 528 Sigaud, L. 2002. The Vicissitudes of *The Gift*. *Social Anthropology* 10, 3: 335–58.
- 529 Smith, A. 1961 [1776]. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.
530 London: Methuen.
- 531 Spencer, H. 1897. *The Principles of Sociology*. New York: Appleton.
- 532 Strathern, M. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with*
533 *Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 534 Tarot, C. 1999. *De Durkheim à Mauss: l’invention du symbolique*. Paris: La découverte.
- 535
- 536
- 537
- 538
- 539
- 540
- 541
- 542
- 543
- 544
- 545
- 546
- 547
- 548
- 549
- 550
- 551
- 552
- 553
- 554
- 555
- 556
- 557
- 558
- 559