



# A Macat analysis of Marcel Mauss's The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies

Elizabeth D. Whitaker

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Published in 1925, *The Gift* is one of French sociologist Marcel Mauss's few non-collaborative works. In it, he elevates what might appear to be a simple gift from the status of innocent object to something that has the capacity to motivate people and define social relationships. *The Gift* analyzes cultures across the world and across time, with the way gifts are given and received working as a guide to understanding the rules and traditions of many different societies. Gifts can be tangible, like jewelry, or intangible, like the offering of skills. But there is always a binding relationship whenever gifts are given, received, or exchanged.

Mauss looks at the evidence of how different cultures operate in this arena in light of the philosophy of his day. This leads him to conclude that understanding the importance of this ritual of giving and receiving leads to a fairer society. Through gifts people grasp the importance of their own social obligations, even though, as Mauss points out, human beings do make choices about their participation in gift exchange.

The *Gift* is still relevant and influential today, because it explains how economics and social and cultural systems affect each other.



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