

**Pedro García Casas**

## What Is the Gift?

This paper discusses the nature of gift from the perspective of philosophical personalism. Since there are different doctrines of gift, it will first provide an overview of anthropological, sociological, philosophical, ethical, and religious approaches to the problem of gift. Then, it will delineate the essential notes of the gift and its structure, and relate the gift to duties of justice. Finally, it will show that the gift is not immanent, but constitutes an anthropological transcendental that helps us to better understand man and his supernatural dimension.

### Anthropological and Sociological Approaches

In contemporary thought, the starting point for the theme of the gift is found in M. Mauss’s work *Essai sur le don*. The author studied the societies of North America, South America, Melanesia, Papua, Africa, Polynesia, etc., and came to the conclusion that giving is the most archaic social form of exchange, according to the triad *give-receive-return*. For Mauss, the most primitive societies were built on donations or gifts, as they impregnated their contracts and economic interests, which in the end obliged and gave rights.<sup>1</sup> Let us note that Mauss un-

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Fr. Pedro García Casas — University of Murcia, Spain  
e-mail: pedro.garciac@um.es • ORCID: 0000-0002-7353-6071

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marcel Mauss, “Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques,” in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1950), 145–279.

derstands donation as a mixture of *freedom* and *moral obligation*; therefore the gift is both *interested* and *disinterested*, *free* and *obligatory*—always of great importance, since societies progress to the extent that they themselves, their subgroups and their individuals are able to establish their own give-receive-return relationships.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, these exchanges and contracts are the primary basis of the market, and include most radical moral, legal and economic principles into any human transaction.<sup>3</sup>

The gift, according to Mauss, is essential in human society and a central element of the archaic economy. Exchanges are respected whenever there is a need to return them not out of legal justice but out of moral duty. The exchange is what articulates the relations between the groups, as it is a measure of whether and how much a donation exalts its giver and its recipient. Mauss even thinks that developed societies could improve their economic structures by recognizing the humanistic aspect of gift exchange—for to give something to someone is to give a part of oneself.

J. T. Gobout and A. Caillé extend the primacy of gift to all societies by defining it as “any provision of goods and services without guarantee of return or consideration, in order to create, nourish or recreate the social bond of people.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the gift is to become a way to turn conflict into alliance through the threefold obligation to *give*, *receive*, and *return*. The gift is also to represent the most encompassing and original social reality that can be conceived beyond the concepts of debt, symbol, sacrifice or religion, which are but moments of the general system of the gift.

Ignacio Falgueras summarizes the position of these authors as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 258.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 147–148.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques T. Godbout, Alain Caillé, *L'esprit du don* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000), 29.

Only the gift is capable of practically overcoming the opposition between the individual and the collectivity, making people members of a larger concrete whole. From the perspective of the gift, society can therefore be understood as a network constituted by the sum of the unique relationships that each member has with others, or also as a group of individuals who permanently try to reduce and familiarize themselves with each other, creating and breaking personal bonds. On these primary links the state and the economy create new but secondary social links.<sup>5</sup>

### The Strictly Philosophical Approach

C. Bruaire proposes to elevate the notion of gift to the ontological plane, to develop what he calls “ontodology.” Bruaire situates the gift at the level of the spiritual being, as a dialectical going out of oneself and denying in man the body to which he is bound by nature.<sup>6</sup> For Bruaire, if giving is postponed due to having, the most authentic part of the gift is falsified, as it is reduced to an economic, legal or any other field that refers to the action. The characteristic of the gift, in turn, is that it is *given in its being by giving*, without having to be based on a record of possibilities that previously defined it. In other words, what is given (who is given) is a spirit in its being when it manifests itself or comes out of itself. It is in this sense that it is affirmed that the gift is an attribute by which the act of being is primarily identified:

[T]he fact of being and being that there is in fact, being as a verb and being as a noun are indiscernible; the fact of being given cannot be distinguished really or modally from the gift itself.

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<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Falgueras, “El dar, actividad plena de la libertad trascendental,” *Studia Poliana* 15 (2013): 75 (my translation).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Justicia y perdón,” in *¡Palabra! Instantáneas filosóficas* (Madrid: Trotta, 2001), 96: “To pronounce the ‘I am’ is to affirm ‘I am not my body’.” My translation.

Identifying in its sense the active and the passive, the gift is a being in and by its act of being.<sup>7</sup>

Bruaire distinguishes two senses in the “giving” that should be differentiated. On the one hand, it is a matter of giving oneself as a manifestation in which the spirit is recognized; giving oneself is in this sense the “manifesting of” what is more, of that which is not exhausted in its appearance but rather manifests itself as being beyond its appearance. On the other hand, giving oneself implies “giving oneself to” someone who welcomes you as new, as something primeval or inderivable. Being in oneself in his apparition and being someone else who recognizes him in his gift are the two co-implicit ways in which the gift is made present.<sup>8</sup>

J. Maritain’s position, in turn, can be described as follows:

On the other hand . . . we find the approach of Jacques Maritain, who sees the person as not integrated in the Universe or in some other whole other than himself, but who is able to enter into himself through self-knowledge and mastery of his own acts and can also leave himself by giving himself to other personal beings, without getting lost through it. . . . [I]ndividuality in man means deficiency and lowering towards the non-being, the personality introduces the opposite perspective of the overabundance in the being which makes him surpass himself until he reaches the fullness of the being entrusted to him.<sup>9</sup>

Maritain’s position could be objected to as entailing a duplicity in man: on the one hand, man’s individuality and, on the other, man’s being a person. However, such a dichotomization is far from Maritain’s thought which is expressed in the following terms:

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<sup>7</sup> Claude Bruaire, *El ser y el espíritu* (Madrid: Caparrós, 1995), 75 (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> According to U. Ferrer, Bruaire does not sufficiently distinguish in the gift the activity of giving and the reception of the giver. Cf. Urbano Ferrer, *Acción, deber, donación* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2015), 147.

<sup>9</sup> Urbano Ferrer, “Introducción al análisis filosófico del dar en los autores franceses contemporáneos” (my translation). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

There is no reality in me that is called my individual and another reality that is called my person. The same being, the whole being, is an individual in one sense and a person in another. We do not distinguish personality and individuality in the human being as we distinguish hydrogen and oxygen in water. If we have to look for comparisons, we think rather of a poem which by its technique belongs to a certain form of versification, to the form of ode, for example, and which by its inspiration is fresh and delicate . . . The ode form is like the individuality of the poem; its freshness and delicacy are like its personality. Individuality and personality are two metaphysical lines that intersect in the unity of each man.<sup>10</sup>

It is to emphasize that, for Maritain, it is not that the personal part of man makes the opposite material part of man disappear, as if it were a Manichean dualism, but the latter is put by the former at the service of the person's capacity for the gift: this is the point that interests us most.

### **The Phenomenology of Giving**

In the phenomenological current, there are two authors of mandatory reference: M. Henry and J. L. Marion. In the opinion of the former, the intentionality of consciousness, as presented by E. Husserl, directs us to what comes to us from outside, leaving this "outside" ascribed to the horizontality of the world. The world, by the way, is that which is external to the consciousness, so that the world's "appearing" to the consciousness does not coincide with that which appears, but is limited to sketching it by means of figures in inappropriate perceptions.

Thus, the mundane as a phenomenon leads to accentuate by contrast the intrinsic phenomenality of life, where giving oneself as a phenomenon is no longer external to it. Life is not housed as one more component among mundane things. In the appearance of the world and

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Persona e individuo," in *Para una filosofía de la persona humana* (Buenos Aires: Club de Lectores, 1984), 160–161 (my translation).

that of life we are dealing with different phenomena, of which only the second is properly and entirely a giving. For a gift of life in the living is originally prior to the world's giving from the outside.

Consequently, in this phenomenological approach, intentionality ceases to be the gateway to what is given as are, for example, the objects that stand out from the horizon of the world. Donation is prior to intentionality. For, in contrast to intentionality and in its strictest sense, donation is self-donation, as it shows itself. From this point of view, what M. Henry wants is to recover the *interiority of the ego* that is generally absent in modern philosophy.

The phenomenological connection of the theme of donation in M. Henry can only take place since Husserl's discovery of the ego as a *transcendence in immanence*. For this reason, in donation *the donor himself is given to himself*, transcending his own appearing to the consciousness, not limiting himself to being with presence before the consciousness, to the way objects are.

On the other hand, more complex and explicit is the line proposed by J. L. Marion who brings together the contributions of J. Derrida, M. Henry and C. Bruaire and, by drawing on Husserl's phenomenology, seeks to perfect both the understanding of phenomenology and that of gift. His motto "as much reduction as donation" can be interpreted as the more phenomenology the more gift, and the more gift the more phenomenology.<sup>11</sup> The nucleus of this interpretation resides in the transition from the theoretical consideration of a phenomenological truth to the practical and experiential consideration of a phenomenon, that of the gift, estimated in a special way. For J. L. Marion goes from an interpretation of the *es gibt* (there is) or the *Gegebenheit*, as a defining characteristic of the truth that can be reached by the phenomenological method, to a thematic interpretation of the gift as a privileged

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<sup>11</sup> Falgueras, "El dar, actividad plena de la libertad trascendental," 80.

phenomenon. This transition is based on the relationship or nominal similarity that exists between the terms *data*, *gift* and *donation*.

Although Marion's project is inconclusive, his approach is clear: to bring the phenomenological method to its most radical purity and, at the same time, to theme the gift phenomenologically until it is reduced to its strictest essence; in other words, his purpose is to make the gift the data par excellence and in the most radical way.

The phenomenological reduction, however, is not the most appropriate procedure to make the act of donation present, since the gift received precedes the awareness that one has of it. When we become conscious of the gift, it is because it has already been given to us; consequently, giving cannot be surprised in its originality in a phenomenological way. Giving is accomplished in the consciousness of the one who receives a gift without any reference to a giver, otherwise we would have to speak of an objectified gift. Therefore, beyond the phenomenon of donation, as Marion says, it is similar to the fold that is hidden behind its unfolding in its phenomenological elements.

### **The Ethical and Religious Approach**

The ethical and religious line allows us to see the gift in relation to responsibility and guilt. In this context, we find J. Derrida who separates the gift from the exchange of goods and places emphasis on the non-reciprocity and non-obligatory nature of every true gift, and on its disinterested character that *does not expect any reward*. While criticizing Mauss, Derrida drastically separates the donational from the economic, showing how Mauss does not understand the difference between the economic and donational exchanges.

*Donation as an Ethical Principle and  
Ethical Gift without Reciprocity*<sup>12</sup>

From an ethical point of view, we can say that giving is what allows us to distinguish between moral attitudes that are authentic and those that are simulated. Giving is present in its intimate relation with the inexhaustibility of the person who, at the same time, is announced and shown in giving.

Certainly, giving branches out into a multiplicity of particular and concrete dares in which the freedom of the person intervenes, cooperating with all these “dares” and lending them their ethical fiber. Therefore, giving without getting involved in what is given, and receiving without getting involved in what is taken, can result in a true caricature of giving.

It is, thus, not a sum of giving and receiving that identifies the gift but the reciprocity in the structure that makes them up. This is viable only if receiving is transformed into active giving, accepting or giving acceptance.

It must be borne in mind that even if the intention of the giver is not to seek restitution (and here lies the authenticity of the true gift), it is equally true that an unrequited gift, at least with the gratitude of the one who benefits from it, could be frustrated as a gift. Nevertheless, even if the case of this frustration were to arise due to a lack of acceptance on the part of the recipient, if the one who gives does so with purity of intention, this will have repercussions on his own good and on his perfection even without being reciprocated. For, in our opinion, unrequited giving has more merit than when it is given by obtaining reward, even if it is not sought. Perhaps the reason for this giving (even to

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<sup>12</sup> See Robert Spaemann, “Antinomien der Liebe,” in *Schritte über uns hinaus. Gesammelte Reden und Aufsätze*, Bd. II (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011), 9–26; Josef Seifert, *¿Qué es y qué motiva una acción moral?* (Madrid: Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, 1995).



enemies) has to be sought in supernatural reasons that transcend all human calculation: not in the other but in the Other with a capital letter.

For Lévinas, the gift is presented within the framework of the intersubjective relationship as directed to Another. This Other is given asymmetrically for the freedom which is questioned by him and which takes charge of his ipseity. In this sense, hospitality is the gift of welcome to the call of the Other. So the ethical relationship is characterized by responsibility to the Other, being such a responsibility that it cannot be delegated. It is an irreversible responsibility that explains the ethical relationship with the other.

In Lévinas the donation is concentrated on the other's face that points to the infinite; hence, the graphic expression "the epiphany of the face": the face is "another who" and has meaning by itself without having to refer to a higher logical genre. Lévinas affirms that the donation of objects in the world is the first step to warn that there is some Other behind, while it is a donation that breaks the circle of immanent needs and at the same time breaks the circuit of giving and taking. Things are given to me inasmuch as they put me in debt with Another, who in turn cannot be given as an object, but rather from transcendence becomes the "encountered" and asks me for help. In this sense, the donation is a function of the otherness of someone. The Other is certainly for an "I," but not as its analog or alter ego, but rather by linking it with the burden of responsibility. It is, therefore, a gift that demands effort and for that reason it is received as a task entrusted to me by the Other. The emphasis, as can be seen, is placed not so much on the gratuity of the donation as on the task associated with the gift.

### *Gift and Sacrifice*

Sacrifice can be a gift made to a superior being through the destruction of a victim. Destruction symbolizes renouncing something one possesses in order to placate, ask for, or worship the divinity to which

one belongs. Typical of these sacrifices is the shedding of blood, since it symbolizes the beginning of life, thus returning with its outpouring to the supreme source of life. The essence of sacrifice, however, is not the bloody death of a victim, but the oblation or offering of self that is made by returning to its origin *the gift* that has been given.

Sacrifice comes from the Latin word *sacer-facere*. It would be a question of putting aside something that one possesses, subtracting it from one's own use or consumption. It is not so much wild animals, but animals that belong to one's farm or are useful for agriculture. In this way, sacrifice becomes a visible expression of voluntariness, an opposite to what would be given under coercion.

### **Love as an Eminent Form of Donation**

Interpersonal love is a response in which the whole person participates intrinsically.<sup>13</sup> While it is a response to the value of a person, it is not an immanent deployment of capacities, nor is it an appetite that is satisfied in what is desired, since in none of these cases is the person identified with them. Pure love is a gift that is given and received for free.

Love is an answer to another person who not only gives something, but implies the gift of self. Only this type of love-response, self-giving, can do justice to personal dignity. So if we consider love as a response, it is no longer possible to dissociate the personal being from its qualities, which are often those that provoke loving access to the person transcending them, to those who in their freedom reveal themselves irreducible to them.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Josef Seifert, *True Love* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2015), 18.

Love as a gift (donation love) is the fullest form of donation and, therefore, contains all possible forms of donation, such as gratuity, forgiveness,<sup>14</sup> friendship, mercy, clemency, congratulation, etc.

In sum, the structure of gift (giving and receiving) is mirrored in the structure of love (a loving person and a loved one).<sup>15</sup> And if the gift is not reified in the margin of giving (as it is always linked to giving), love does not remain substantively in man as a person different from the one he loves, but makes it manifest (as love with works) that one loves. It is to hold that loving self-giving is prior to any expressed unilateral will. Therefore, love accompanies the person in his or her being directed beyond, toward a transcendent destiny: God Himself. It is the personal God who places in a concrete man the loving orientation toward Him. For only He who is the origin of love can also be the destiny of love.

### Essential Notes on Giving

We must distinguish between *giver*, *gift* and *given*. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, in the name *gift* the *aptitude* to be given is implicit: “[W]hat is given has an aptitude or relation both to the giver and to that to which it is given. For it would not be given by anyone, unless it was his to give; and it is given to someone to be his.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between gift and forgiveness, see Mariano Crespo, *Das Verzeihen. Eine philosophische Untersuchung* (Heidelberg 2002), translated into Spanish under the title: *El perdón una investigación filosófica* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2004); Mariano Crespo, “El perdón y sus efectos curativos frente al sufrimiento y la muerte,” *El valor ético de la afectividad. Estudios de ética fenomenológica* (Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2012); Antonio Malo, “Don, culpa y perdón (Elementos para una fenomenología del perdón),” *Metafísica y Persona* 4, no. 7 (Enero–Junio 2012): 55–67.

<sup>15</sup> Urbano Ferrer, “Filosofía del amor y del don como manifestación de la persona,” *Quien* 3 (2016): 23–33.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q, 38, a. 1. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

Therefore, *donation* is the best word to express *gift*, which is characterized mainly by its gratuitousness, or being unnecessary. It is given voluntarily: if it were a business transaction, we could no longer speak of a gift.

The donation has a threefold structure which comprises a giver, a recipient and a gift. This can lead us to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, since we can find ourselves with reference to a gift without mentioning a giver or a recipient, which implies a reductive view of it. It should also be noted that the gift is not that which mediates between a giver and a recipient in the form of something separable from them, but that which includes the one “who gives himself” in “what he gives” to others. In other words, the gift contains the whole person who is a giver. Moreover, the donation in a proper sense requires to be not only gratuitous on the part of a giver, but also freely accepted on the part of a recipient: if the recipient were forced to accept it, the donation would cease to be a gift. It implies that a genuine gift also demands to be free in what is given. This can be called a “congruence of giving.”<sup>17</sup>

It follows then that the recipient is not passive, but rather active equally to the giver, although in a subordinate way, since the initiative always belongs to the giver. For this reason, the gift is not consumed until an active acceptance by the recipient takes place, which means that the donation cannot be a gift until it is received in the formal sense: *the gift is built on giving*. Falgueras, however, finds the scholastic adage *nemo dat quod non habet* insufficient, and says that this is a causal principle, not a gift, since the gift neither pre-exists nor follows the donation—it is made *jointly* by the giver and the recipient in the same act of giving, a fruit of the gratuitousness on one another’s part.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ignacio Falgueras, “Causar, producir, dar,” in *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica* (Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 1997), 64.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

Another characteristic of a gift, perhaps the most striking one, is that in order to be pure *it excludes any loss* concerning both the one who receives and the one who gives. The receiver does not experience any loss but rather profit, provided that the gift is understood in the terms described above. Likewise, in the case of the giver there is no loss either. Moreover, we can also affirm that in pure giving there is nothing but profit. Even if there can be a loss in terms of the material aspect of what is given, the spiritual aspect of gift giving is that which always perfects the giver in terms of intransitive results of his or her acts of giving. The nobler and purer a gift is, the fewer losses it entails. For example, “giving” or sharing spiritual goods does not impoverish any giver, but is that which enriches them.

### **The Relationship of Giving with the Obligations of Justice**

With regard to the reconciliation of giving and the obligation of justice, it was Paul Ricoeur who carried out a detailed study on the gratuitousness of giving, the duties and their imperative character.<sup>19</sup>

There are two allegories by which justice is represented. On the one hand, the blindfolded lady with scales, and on the other, the sword of Damocles suspended by a hair. Both images seem utterly alien to the nature of gift. It seems that the distance separating giving from doing justice is huge, and the attempt to reconcile them is forced; nevertheless, there is a link that needs to be pointed out here in order to better understand what giving is in its essence.

In that which is determined as just we find a triadic structure that has some similarity to the triad analyzed above regarding donation. Here a subject A does justice to B by giving him what corresponds to C. Likewise, in the act of doing collective justice the different parts are

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Amor y justicia* (Madrid: Trotta, 2008).

determined (it is clear who-what is A, B and C), establishing in their being the boundaries between them, giving them what they are entitled to as parties. However, unlike what happens with the gift, when we receive what is just, we do not incur a debt of disinterestedness or the like; rather, the opposite is assumed, for when we receive an act of justice, the first debt is liquidated or settled.

Paradoxically, it is at this point that justice and self-giving come together, for the demands of justice arise from being a debtor, and it is precisely being a debtor that arises from receiving some gift gratuitously. In this way, we see how the relation of justice to gift is presented as a task that must be continually re-established, rather than as an act accomplished once and for all. As Ferrer states:

Whenever we act in social life, and when our action has a recipient, we become debtors or creditors to the latter and face a demand—in terms of justice—to establish a balance between the parties which comes from a need for full satisfaction . . . For this reason, the giver's situation does not allow the omission or substitution of this need, since it always comes first, while the duty of justice is an ethical obligation to pay the debt, although it cannot be paid completely, given the initial difference between the donation and the repayment.<sup>20</sup>

While it is true that this debt has its origin in a gift that cannot be repaid, the duty of justice consists in paying debts to others. In both gift and justice there is a difference between the giver and the recipient, for not only they are different persons, but also in the case of gift there is no prior debt or obligation, as is the case with justice, but there is someone who voluntarily gives it.

Another difference between justice and gift is that justice requires recourse to a third party to act as an arbiter between the parties (since one cannot be both a judge and a party), hence justice requires institutionalization. In this sense, the impartiality and equality of par-

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<sup>20</sup> Ferrer, *Acción, deber, donación*, 196. My translation.

ties, that characterize the *iustitia commutativa*, do not represent the ultimate ideal of justice, but rather are conventional adjustments measured by market prices or sanctions imposed by authority.

In a different order of things, what justice brings to donation is *the seriousness of not treating it as a game* or something one does only when certain conditions are met in a subjective way (be it a whim, a desire of a moment, etc.), but makes us see that donation is the only adequate attitude in social relations and that it is just without remaining in the arbitrary and elusive nature of personal desires of a moment.

### **A Conclusion: The Gift of Love as an Anthropological Transcendental<sup>21</sup>**

The question of the gift is the same question that we find in relation to the person. Therefore, in order to clarify and enter into the depths of its mystery, we will try to inscribe the gift in the person on the basis of the doctrine of anthropological transcendentals, distinguished from metaphysical transcendentals. We will use the doctrine of anthropological transcendentals given by Leonardo Polo.

To be precise, anthropological transcendentals are those that constitute the person in his act of being. There is a hierarchical order in them from less to more, and thus we can find and name them by going from the lower to the highest: coexistence, freedom, cognition, and love. Let us say that they are not properties derived from human nature, but rather those that allow us to identify and recognize the personal being in each person. Let us look at each of these transcendentals and the interrelationship between them.

With regard to *coexistence*, we immediately see that the person not only exists, but also coexists with others. He is not a finite being

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Leonardo Polo, *Antropología trascendental*, Vol. I: *La persona humana* (Navarra: Eunsa, 2010), 195–237; Ferrer, *Acción, deber, donación*, 199–209.

that can be closed off, but needs coexistence—otherwise he could not exercise his freedom, he could not know himself, and finally he could not give himself in love to others. Coexistence means that the person exists in company, is open from within, like a door that opens from within. In Ferrer's view:

[C]oexistence is not an essential manifestation of the person . . . but its first transcendental note, distinct from, though convertible with, personal freedom. The distinctive feature of coexistence is that it primarily reveals the duality of the human act and transfers it to the four radical characteristics of the person: intimacy (i.e., the person's character coexistent with his personal being), freedom, rationality, and love . . . According to his coexistence, the person—the who of each one—is irreducible or incommunicable. This is not, of course, an individuation of the universal concept (i.e., *unum in multis*), for the person does not exist as a universal, but coexists in his being. Coexistence, then, is not a categorical mode of existence among others, i.e., a limitation of existence in general, but is an extension of existence, a second existence which accompanies the being of the universe, itself in its essence and nature, other persons, and in some way God in his personal, uncreated being.<sup>22</sup>

*Freedom*, in turn, is not a private property, but identifies people as individuals. We find a duality in it: on the one hand, it must accept itself as having a future that is given to it, and on the other hand, it is inseparable from the search for its purpose. In this sense, freedom is not a property of human acts but exists in personal coexistence and makes it possible to determine the who (the person). In this way, freedom belongs to the order of the person's being and, from that order, is given to the person's powers and actions.

We can also contemplate freedom from the perspective of the temporality, characteristic of the person, meaning that the person is not inserted in a before-and-after line, but is a future that never loses its char-

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<sup>22</sup> Urbano Ferrer, "Coexistencia y trascendencia," *Studia Poliana* 14 (2012): 40–41. My translation.



acteristic. The future is important in relation to freedom because it does not come now, but reveals the primacy of freedom over time; it thus opens freedom to the future that is not destined for the past. In the same way, the future is not determined by human freedom, but it allows us to enter into the created condition of the person.

Besides coexistence and freedom, there also is *knowledge*. For the man knows himself as a person and knows that he coexists. Although the knowledge of the personal being is not complete, it is prior to and superior to the knowledge of a being known intentionally as an object which reveals nothing of the personal being. In the knowledge-freedom relation, knowledge brings a motive toward which freedom is oriented and which gives freedom a direction that it would not find on its own.

Coexistence, freedom and knowledge converge in love, i.e., the gift of self. It is to remember that what is given in love is not something foreign to or different from the person, but it is the person himself. And only in this way love or gift-giving is a genuine transcendence and not a mere external service. In other words, to quote Ferrer: “*to give a gift is another way of saying to give without getting lost.*”<sup>23</sup>

In short, it can be said that when the person gives something of himself to another, even if he forgets the reason why he gave his gift, the one who initiated the communication and was the recipient of it will remain in his memory. It is impossible to separate communication and its content from persons and what is personal.

The relationship between the anthropological transcendentals is only possible through the person; it is in this relationship that the anthropological transcendentals meet in a hierarchical manner, which in turn is the basis for the metaphysical transcendentals (being, truth, and goodness). If this were not the case, without a personal being what was

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<sup>23</sup> Ferrer, *Acción, deber, donación*, 205.

communicated would remain material as a set of truths in itself without real support, and man would fall prey to either philosophical idealism or nominalist voluntarism. However, being as the first transcendental is what makes the realism of transcendentals possible.



### What Is the Gift?

#### SUMMARY

This article discusses the problem of gift from the perspective of philosophical personalism. Since there are different doctrines of gift, it first provides an overview of anthropological, sociological, philosophical, ethical, and religious approaches to the nature of gift. Then, it delineates the essential notes of the gift and its structure, and relates the gift to duties of justice. Finally, it shows that the gift constitutes an anthropological transcendental that helps us to better understand man and his supernatural dimension.

#### KEYWORDS

Gift, donation, love, sacrifice, justice, anthropological transcendental.

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