



Godbout, Jacques T.

1998 The World of the Gift. Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Notes: viii, 250 p.; 24 cm. In collaboration with Alain Caillé; translated from the French by Donald Winkler. ISBN: 0773517510

**Reviewed 24 Oct 2008 by:
Muhammad Aurang Zeb Mughal
Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Islamabad,
Pakistan**

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ABSTRACT: Godbout and Caillé show the significance of gift exchange in human life in strengthening social relations beyond market economy. The book was written in French then translated into English.

In *The world of the Gift*, Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé discuss the importance of gifts in social relations and have primarily stressed that despite their economic significance, gifts are primarily of social, moral and emotional worth. They oppose the view that the concept of the gift is no longer of value; instead, they argue that charity is a form of gift and is increasing with the passage of time in most of the industrialized world (p.26). In this way, they have elaborated the gift as a social bond even in the present day societies, substantiating their views through valid examples while debating other views in the literature.

In fourteen chapters of this book, Godbout and Caille have presented the history of the gift from ancient to the modern societies and discussed its forms in different cultural settings -- not only the archaic notions of gift, like potlatch and kula (pp.103-105), but volunteer works, organ donations, and the relationship between artists and society are also forms prevailing in the world today -- all have moral and social significance (pp.82-91). They are convinced of the role of gift in the social integration beyond the material value of the object and say:

"We have, however, gradually come to believe that the gift is just as typical of modern and contemporary societies as it is typical of archaic one; that it does not only isolated and discontinuous incidents in social life but social life in its entirety. Today, still, nothing can be initiated or undertaken, can thrive or function, if it is not nourished by the gift." (p.11)

They reject the idea that societies survive on market exchange and that self-interest dominates the human world. Gifting as an important element of social connections creates a moral sense associating the members not necessarily for economic reciprocity but more for emotional ties, and strengthens social relations. For instance, they note how family inheritance continues over generations as an un-reciprocal form of gift (p.50). The book concludes to say that the world functions through inter-personal and inter-group obligations in the form of gifts through which society seeks to

survive. So, the book is worth reading not only by economic anthropologists, or other social science researchers who want to debate formal and substantive approaches towards economics, but also by anyone wishing to understand how the world works in a socialized way.

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