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The Gift as Shared Humanity: A Cross-Cultural Phenomenology of Moral Obligation



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Abstract

This study offers a critical investigation of the ethical, phenomenological, and communitarian dimensions of the gift by bringing Marcel Mauss's theory of reciprocity into dialogue with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Through this interdisciplinary encounter, the research illuminates the moral horizons and ontological structures that underpin the very notion of giving. Using a library-based research design and a hermeneutic, conceptual-phenomenological methodology, the study engages primary philosophical texts and key interpretive commentaries to reveal how the act of giving forms a moral and ontological matrix in which otherness contributes to the constitution of selfhood and the conditions of human co-existence. The analysis and discussion were guided by Phenomenological Ethical Relationality Theory, which emphasizes the interplay between self, other, and communal lifeworld's in the emergence of moral meaning.

Findings show that the gift transcends economic exchange, disclosing a lived intentionality rooted in empathy, responsibility, and communal interdependence. By integrating classical phenomenology with African communitarian ethics—particularly Ubuntu and Ujamaa—the study demonstrates that giving is a moral necessity that sustains personhood, strengthens social harmony, and grounds ethical life in reciprocal relationality. The study concludes that a phenomenology of the gift reorients ethics and socio-economic practice toward generosity, mutuality, and shared human flourishing. The paper recommends further exploration of gift game theory to model reciprocity in ethical and social systems, and proposes extending the concept of the gift to ecological relations, envisioning environmental sustainability as an act of moral reciprocity toward the earth and future generations.

Keywords

Gift, Intersubjectivity, Moral anthropology of Gift

1.0 Introduction

The question of the gift occupies a central yet paradoxical position in modern thought, standing at the crossroads of anthropology, sociology, ethics, and philosophy. Since the publication of Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (The Gift) in 1925, scholars have been captivated by the gift's enduring tension between altruism and reciprocity, freedom and obligation, the personal and the communal. Mauss demonstrated that the act of giving transcends mere economic transaction: it is a "fait social total," a total social phenomenon encompassing legal, moral, religious, and symbolic dimensions of human existence (Beaucaire, 2022). In line with Mauss, scholars such as Gourlay (2022); Tumin et al (1956); Whitaker (2017) urge that gift creates bonds that structure social life obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate thereby ensuring the circulation of solidarity and the moral continuity of community. While, Mauss's anthropology revealed the external and institutional logic of the gift, leaving open the question of its inner experience the meaning of giving as lived by the subject. This is where phenomenology, especially that of Edmund Husserl, becomes a vital interlocutor. Husserl's project, developed in works such as *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1931), a work that explores intersubjectivity, and *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970) dealing with critical examination of the sciences and their relationship to pure phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy that sought to describe how phenomena appear to consciousness. He illuminated the structures of intentionality, the directedness of consciousness toward something and intersubjectivity, the co-constitution of meaning between self and other. These notions provide a rich philosophical language for reinterpreting the gift not simply as a social structure, but as a structure of lived experience.

Within a Husserlian framework, giving can be viewed as an intentional act directed toward the Other (Das Andere), arising from empathy (Einfühlung) and situated within the shared lifeworld (Lebenswelt). The gift thus becomes a mode of being-with-others (Mitsein), wherein meaning and value are co-constituted through lived relations. This phenomenological perspective deepens Mauss's social analysis by unveiling the subjective and intersubjective experience that animates the act of giving: the joy of generosity, the humility of receiving, and the anticipation of reciprocity are not just external cultural codes but intentional, embodied experiences through which the self realizes its ethical relation to the Other. In Husserl's philosophical context, "the Other" often refers to someone or something that is distinct from oneself, playing a crucial role in discussions about identity, intersubjectivity and relationship.

Building on Mauss, later thinkers have explored this existential and ethical dimension of the gift in various directions. Emmanuel Levinas for example, interpreted giving as the foundation of ethics itself, grounded in the infinite responsibility toward the Other (Lévinas, 1969). For Levinas, the gift is the gesture of welcoming the Other beyond the horizon of self-interest, a transcendence that cannot be reduced to reciprocity. Similarly, Jean-Luc Marion proposed a "phenomenology of givenness" (phénoménologie du donné), where the gift becomes the paradigm of all manifestation, revealing being as something received rather than produced (Caputo, 2006). For Marion, true giving suspends the economy of exchange and exposes the subject to pure reception of what he calls the "event of donation." Conversely, Jacques Derrida problematized the very possibility of the pure gift, arguing that once a gift is recognized as such by either giver or receiver it enters the realm of reciprocity and thereby loses its gratuity (Marshall, 1997). Derrida's paradox highlights a key tension between the Maussian understanding of the gift as mutual obligation and the phenomenological aspiration to uncover its meaning beyond economic calculus. He also underscores the importance of consciousness and temporality: a gift can be pure only if it escapes awareness of giving, yet human consciousness, as Husserl insists, is always reflexive and intentional.

These philosophical debates prompted a profound reflection on relational existence, a theme that is pivotal not only within phenomenological discourse but also within African communitarian ethics, as exemplified in the work of African philosophers such as John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy* (Beidelman, 1976), Mwal Julius Nyerere in *Ujamaa. The Basis of African Socialism* (Nyerere, 1987), Kwame Nkruma in *Philosophia Africana* (Agadá, 2022), Kwasi Wiredu in *Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion* (Wiredu, 1998) to mention but a few. Their works have long emphasized that personhood is realized through others, summed up in the Zulu proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"). Within this communitarian worldview, gift-giving is not a voluntary act of charity but a moral necessity grounded in the shared life of the community. From this perspective, the gift is phenomenological before it is sociological: it expresses the lived consciousness of interdependence that defines human existence. Furthermore, Paul Ricoeur (Westphal, 1994) and Jürgen Habermas (Weberman et al., 1992) have argued that giving plays a key role in the hermeneutics of selfhood and the ethics of communication. For Ricoeur, the self is constituted through narrative and solicitude the capacity to give and receive recognition while Habermas situates reciprocity at the heart of communicative action. These frameworks resonate strongly with both Mauss and Husserl, revealing that giving is a dialogical act that constructs meaning within the intersubjective space of the lifeworld. The central question it pursues is to find out what happens when the Maussian gift is examined through the Husserlian lens of lived experience.

An analysis of Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift offers a profound exploration of the moral and social significance of gift practices within what he termed "archaic societies." Mauss contends that the act of giving is never disinterested or purely utilitarian; rather, it inaugurates a triadic moral structure, the obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate which underpins the social and ethical cohesion of communal life. Through these obligations, the gift becomes a moral economy in which persons and things circulate within a symbolic system of value, recognition, and reciprocity (Whitaker, 2017). Far from being reducible to material exchange, the gift embodies what Mauss calls a "total social fact" an act that integrates economic, moral, spiritual, and relational dimensions into a single gesture of human interdependence. In this sense, Mauss discloses a moral grammar of human coexistence, wherein ethical responsibility and social solidarity are inseparable from the very act of giving.

When interpreted phenomenologically, Mauss's moral anthropology opens onto deeper questions of intersubjectivity and ethical encounter. These questions resonate strongly with Edmund Husserl's phenomenological investigations into empathy (Einfühlung), the lifeworld (Lebenswelt), and the constitution of the Other (Husserl, 1973, 1980). For Husserl, the self's relation to the Other is not an abstract epistemic event but a primordial structure of lived experience, in which subjectivity is always already intertwined with alterity. Both Mauss and Husserl thus converge in recognizing that human relations are not founded on utility or contract but on a deeper ethical givenness of the Other, a recognition that precedes and grounds all forms of reciprocity and exchange. This convergence allows for a reinterpretation of the gift as both a social act and a transcendental gesture, situating moral obligation within the structures of consciousness and lived relationality.

An ethical phenomenology of the gift extends this convergence by reinterpreting giving as a phenomenon of moral disclosure, in which the self-encounters the Other as both giver and receiver of meaning. Within this framework, the gift is not an external transaction but an event of intersubjective constitution, where ethical responsibility emerges prior to volition. Husserl's notion of the givenness of the Other (Gegebenheit des Anderen) provides a phenomenological grounding for this claim: the self is constituted through its openness to alterity, through the call of the Other that gives meaning to one's own subjectivity (Husserl, 1980). This reading transforms Mauss's anthropology of obligation into a phenomenological ethics of encounter, suggesting that giving arises from the original openness of consciousness to the Other. The act of giving thus becomes an ethical revelation, a moment where generosity, reciprocity, and recognition are woven into the conditions of human existence. To give, in this view, is to acknowledge the Other as co-constitutor of the shared lifeworld.

This synthesis between Mauss and Husserl carries significant implications for contemporary ethical and social thought. In a global context increasingly shaped by instrumental rationality and commodified relations, reinterpreting the gift through a phenomenological lens restores attention to the moral intentionality underlying human coexistence. It challenges the reduction of social life to economic or contractual logic by exposing the primordial ethical dimension of intersubjectivity, the condition through which persons are bound together in mutual responsibility. The gift is therefore inseparable from an infinite ethical demand; the obligation that cannot be reciprocated without transforming the gift into commerce. As noted by Jean-Luc Marion in the phenomenology of givenness; every genuine gift manifests the excess of donation that surpasses intentional control (Caputo, 2006). By linking Mauss's moral anthropology with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, the ethical phenomenology of the gift thus provides a renewed vocabulary for reimagining solidarity, hospitality, and moral responsibility. It suggests that ethical life does not emerge from abstract norms or duties but from the original givenness of relational existence a dynamic interplay of giving and receiving that constitutes the very possibility of moral community. This study therefore intends to integrate Mauss's theory of the gift with Husserl's account of intentionality and intersubjectivity, with the aim of articulating a coherent ethical phenomenology of giving that reinterprets human coexistence through the intertwined dynamics of generosity, recognition, and relational responsibility.

2.0 Research Methodology

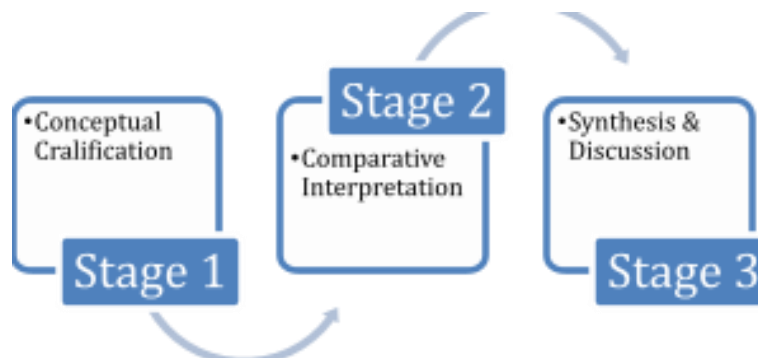


Figure 1: Research Stages

Figure 1 presents a methodological framework. The study employs a conceptual and hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology within the qualitative research approach. Rather than relying on empirical data, it undertakes a critical textual and philosophical analysis to explore the ethical and phenomenological dimensions of the gift. The inquiry centers on key works, including Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (Beaucaire, 2022) Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* and *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (Husserl, 1970, 1931) complemented by interpretive contributions from Emmanuel Levinas (Rhodes, (Lévinas, 1969; Ricoeur & Escobar, 2004), Jean-Luc Marion, (Caputo, 2006), and Jacques Derrida (Marshall, 1997). Through a hermeneutic reading, the study reconstructs Mauss's anthropology of the gift as a moral economy grounded in obligation, reciprocity, and solidarity. The phenomenological lens then illuminates how giving is lived as an intentional and intersubjective act of ethical encounter. The research proceeds through conceptual clarification of core notions of gift, givenness, intersubjectivity, and ethical responsibility followed by comparative interpretation and critical synthesis. As a library-based philosophical inquiry, the study relies exclusively on secondary sources books, journal articles, and theoretical commentaries analyzed through interpretive reasoning and conceptual integration. This methodology is particularly suited to the present study because the phenomenon of the gift cannot be adequately captured through empirical observation or quantitative analysis. Its ethical and phenomenological depth requires reflection on meaning, intentionality, and lived experience. The conceptual, hermeneutic approach thus provides the most appropriate framework for uncovering the moral structures and intersubjective dimensions that constitute the essence of giving, enabling a rigorous articulation of the ethical phenomenology of the gift.

3.0 The Gift and Shared Humanity: A Phenomenology of Moral Obligation

3.1 The Gift as a Moral Phenomenon

Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (1925/2002) reveals that the act of giving transcends the realm of material exchange and becomes a moral phenomenon that sustains the fabric of social life. The gift, according to Mauss, is imbued with an invisible moral force that binds giver and receiver in a continuous circulation of obligation, gratitude, and reciprocity. This triadic structure giving, receiving, and reciprocating constitutes more than a sociological description of exchange; it expresses a lived moral experience, an ethical intentionality embedded within human coexistence. In this sense, the gift represents a moral phenomenology: it manifests how moral meaning and obligation emerge from within lived relationships rather than from external prescriptions.

The analysis of Mauss' work demonstrates that every act of giving bears within it a "spirit" (*hau*), symbolizing the enduring presence and moral claim of the giver within the gift. This symbolic presence transforms the economic gesture into an ethical event, wherein the self is called to responsibility through the recognition of the Other (Hegel, 2023; Lévinas, 1969; Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013; Rhodes, 2023; Ricoeur & Escobar, 2004). The obligation to reciprocate is not simply contractual; it arises as a moral experience of indebtedness, a response to an ethical appeal that precedes rational calculation. Here, the moral weight of the gift lies in its capacity to disclose the relational essence of duty, the awareness that one's being is constituted through relations of giving and receiving. Viewed phenomenologically, the gift thus reveals the moral structure of intersubjectivity. Just as Husserl describes how the self-encounters the Other as a co-constituting consciousness (Husserl, 1931), Mauss shows that social existence itself is sustained by acts that affirm and recognize the Other. The phenomenology of the gift uncovers the genesis of moral obligation as an intentional experience: to give is to affirm the Other's worth and to be drawn into a relationship of mutual recognition. The moral "ought" to be therefore not an external imposition but a lived structure of consciousness grounded in intersubjective experience.

This phenomenological insight converges significantly with Kant's duty ethics, yet it also transforms it. In Kantian moral philosophy, duty derives from rational autonomy and the universality of the moral law: one must act out of respect for duty, treating others as ends in themselves (Kant & Gregor, 1996). Mauss's anthropology, by contrast, exposes the pre-reflective origins of such duty; it shows that before moral law is articulated, there is already an ethical life where obligation is felt, lived, and reciprocated. The duty to give, in this sense, is not only rational but relational; it arises from the phenomenological encounter with the Other, where responsibility is experienced as an inner call rather than an external rule. Thus, Mauss complements Kant by situating duty within the affective and communal lifeworld of human existence.

It is at this intersection that Emmanuel Levinas radicalizes both traditions. For Levinas, the encounter with the face of the Other inaugurates an infinite responsibility, a duty that precedes freedom, choice, or reciprocity (Lévinas, 1969). In this view, the ethical relation is asymmetrical: the self is summoned by the Other before it can respond, already indebted by the mere presence of alterity. Levinas's phenomenology of responsibility deepens Mauss's insight by revealing that the gift, in its purest form, is not motivated by the expectation of return but by the irreducible command of the Other's vulnerability. The true gift, therefore, is not a transaction of equivalence but an act of transcendence, an ethical gesture that gives without seeking balance, recognizing that the Other's need always exceeds one's capacity to fulfill it.

In this vein, the gift becomes the very paradigm of moral phenomenology. It unites the lived intentionality of intersubjective experience, the rational universality of moral law, and the transcendent responsibility toward the Other. To give is to inhabit this ethical horizon where phenomenological experience and moral duty converge. The gift thus embodies a phenomenology

of responsibility, a lived consciousness in which the self discovers its moral vocation through encounter, openness, and response.

Ultimately, the moral phenomenon of the gift reveals the heart of ethical life: the recognition that obligation is not imposed from outside but arises from exteriority and the relational structure of existence itself. It calls the self to act not merely out of reason, nor solely out of emotion, but from an awareness of shared humanity that demands responsibility. In giving, one participates in the ethical constitution of the world, affirming that morality is, at its core, the lived reciprocity of responsibility and the transcendence of self toward the Other.

3.2 The Gift and the Human Function of Protection

Marcel Mauss's seminal work on gift-giving provides an important anthropological entry point into understanding the moral function of protection in human societies. He has argued that the gift is never a simple economic transaction but a social mechanism that generates obligations of care, solidarity, and mutual protection. Gift practices found across diverse societies create and sustain relationships that bind communities together. These obligations emerge because individuals alone are insufficient for survival; the gift becomes a communal response to the basic fragility of human existence. This insight acquires deeper philosophical grounding in Martin Heidegger's concept of "thrownness" *Geworfenheit*. In *Being and Time* (Martín, 2023), Heidegger asserts that human beings (*Dasein*) find themselves "thrown" into a world they did not choose embedded in social, historical, and material contexts prior to any act of agency. Thrownness discloses an existential condition characterized by exposure, dependency, and uncertainty. Human beings are not self-sufficient entities but relationally situated beings whose existence is marked by vulnerability from the very beginning.

When placed alongside Mauss's analysis, gift-giving appears not merely as a cultural habit but as a moral response to the existential precariousness into which all humans are thrown. Through gifts, societies construct webs of security that mitigate the uncertainties of being-in-the-world. Contemporary vulnerability theorists reinforce this view by arguing that vulnerability is universal and structural rather than accidental (Cummins, 2019; Engster, 2019; Petherbridge, 2016). Our embodiment, emotional needs, social interdependence, and susceptibility to harm are not anomalies but constitutive features of human life. This philosophical anthropology aligns with Heidegger's existential ontology: human life is always already dependent, relational, and exposed. From this perspective, the gift becomes a concrete manifestation of the moral imperative that arises from shared vulnerability. To give is to safeguard the Other's existence, acknowledging that one's own survival is likewise contingent upon the care of others. This foundational vulnerability is further illuminated by Emmanuel Levinas, whose ethics begins in the encounter with the face of the Other. Lévinas, (1969) maintains that the Other's face interrupts the autonomy of the self and summons it into responsibility even before any contractual or reciprocal arrangement. The face reveals the Other's fragility its exposedness to suffering and mortality and this vulnerability carries an ethical command. In Levinasian terms, the gift is not an act of generosity but an unavoidable obligation arising from the Other's appeal for protection (Ricoeur & Escobar, 2004). When read through Heidegger's notion of thrownness, this relational demand becomes clearer: both self and Other are thrust into a precarious world where their survival depends on meaningful responses from others.

Ricoeur's conception of solicitude adds another layer to this understanding. For him, moral life emerges from the interplay between human fragility and the capacity to act responsibly on behalf of others (Engster, 2019; Petherbridge, 2016). Solicitude affirms the dignity and agency of the Other by ensuring the conditions of their flourishing. Here also, Heidegger's notion of thrownness provides the ontological foundation for Ricoeur's ethical vision. Our fragility is not incidental but woven into the very structure of being-in-the-world, making the protective dimensions of the gift an affirmation of our shared existential condition. Taken together, these perspectives converge on a profound insight: because human beings are thrown into a world marked by vulnerability and dependency, the act of giving becomes a moral response that protects, sustains, and affirms our shared humanity. The gift is therefore not merely a cultural or economic phenomenon but a fundamental ethical expression of what it means to exist with others in a vulnerable world. In this way, ethical responsibility emerges from human fragility and the recognition of the Other. Intersubjectivity reveals that our very experience of the world is co-constituted with others, and that our capacity for care, protection, and giving arises from this shared horizon of mutual exposure.

3.3 Ubuntu, Relational Ethics, and the Moral Imperative of the Gift

The moral phenomenology of the gift underscores that giving is not merely an economic transaction but a moral act revealing the essence of human interrelation. Levinas (1969) deepens this insight phenomenologically by situating the ethical encounter in the face of the Other, where responsibility toward the Other precedes any calculation of benefit. Together, these perspectives position giving as a moral event that discloses the human vocation: to protect and sustain one another. This moral dynamic resonates vividly in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which survives from communal interdependence and shared humanity. The aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons") captures a relational ontology in which human identity is constituted through others (Ramose, 1999). Within this framework, moral action is inseparable from social responsibility; one's dignity and flourishing are intrinsically tied to the well-being of the

community. Ubuntu thus aligns with a deontological orientation: moral worth is realized through the fulfillment of one's duties to others rather than through self-interest or utilitarian outcomes (Metz, 2011). Ubuntu manifests practically in communal ethics, mutual aid, collective labor, and reciprocal care. During droughts, famine, or social upheaval, these values guide communities to prioritize collective survival over individual accumulation. In Zimbabwe, for instance, boka (mutual assistance groups) enable rural families to pool labor and resources, ensuring agricultural productivity and food security amid scarcity (Nyagumbo, 1997). During apartheid, Ubuntu's ethos of solidarity underpinned community resistance, fostering networks of care and moral resilience in the face of systemic oppression (Tutu, 1999). In these instances, the "gift" is not mere charity but an ethical imperative rooted in the recognition of shared vulnerability and mutual protection. This communal ethic finds a close parallel in Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa in Tanzania, which sought to institutionalize the moral principles of gift and reciprocity in socio-economic policy. Ujamaa (literally "familyhood") envisioned a socialist economy grounded in cooperation, collective ownership, and human dignity (Nyerere, 1987). Though criticized for its economic inefficiencies, Ujamaa embodied the moral conviction that the purpose of society and economy alike is the protection and flourishing of all, particularly the most vulnerable. Programs such as villagization emphasized self-reliance through shared production and equitable distribution, echoing the Ubuntu ethic of communal care as moral duty (Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013).

This convergence of African communal ethics and phenomenological philosophy can resonate the affirmation of the proposition that: Our vulnerability is not incidental but a constitutive feature of existence, woven into the very structure of being-in-the-world. As noted earlier on from Husserl's works, selfhood and experience are always constituted in relation to others; consciousness is inherently directed toward the Other, and the recognition of the Other's existence shapes our own. Ubuntu and Ujamaa exemplify this intersubjective moral horizon: the individual's dignity, survival, and flourishing are inseparable from the well-being of others, and moral obligations arise from this mutual embeddedness. Gift-giving and reciprocal care, whether in communal labor, mutual assistance groups, or collective resource sharing, enact an intersubjective ethic: they acknowledge the Other's vulnerability while affirming the relational constitution of the self. In this light, the moral phenomenology of the gift is both African and universal, demonstrating that ethical life is grounded in the interplay between shared vulnerability, relational identity, and the responsibility to protect and sustain one another.

Ultimately, the moral phenomenology of the gift reveals that the essence of being human is realized through living for and with others, in recognition of our shared vulnerability and interdependence. Ethical giving is therefore not a peripheral or optional aspect of social life but a central moral imperative, one that structures communities, sustains collective resilience, and affirms the dignity and flourishing of all member



3.4 The Relevance of the Moral Phenomenology of the Gift in Today's Society

In a world increasingly defined by economic inequity, social atomization, and ecological devastation, the moral phenomenology of the gift discloses an indispensable reorientation of human existence and ethical relation. It reveals that to give, to receive, and to reciprocate are not contingent moral acts but ontological structures constitutive of being itself. Within this horizon, human existence emerges not as an autonomous substance but as a relational event, a being-with whose meaning unfolds only through its encounter with alterity.

The dominant neoliberal paradigm, grounded in the ideals of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and instrumental rationality, has produced a profound crisis of interhuman relations. By privileging the self-enclosed subject as the locus of value and knowledge, modernity has obscured the intersubjective matrix through which both subjectivity and moral responsibility are constituted. The phenomenology of the gift thus demands a decisive reversal: the recognition that the self is not the origin but the outcome of relationality. It is through the face and presence of the other that one's own being is called into question, opened, and thereby realized. To place the value of the other ahead of oneself is to affirm the transcendence of alterity that makes selfhood possible. Such a disposition resists the reduction of the other to an object of exchange or utility, restoring instead the primacy of ethical responsibility as the ground of ontology. This re-centering of relational beings challenges the atomistic logic of consumer culture and gestures toward a renewed humanism grounded in mutual recognition, generosity, and shared vulnerability. In this light, the moral phenomenology of the gift offers more than an ethical corrective; it articulates a metaphysical and practical horizon within which humanity may confront its global challenges. Only through a reawakening to our intersubjective constitution can we begin to transcend the crises of alienation, inequality, and ecological collapse that define the contemporary world. The gift, understood as the phenomenological expression of intersubjective openness, thus becomes the path through which human beings may rediscover both their moral vocation and their ontological truth.

For the economic domain, the moral phenomenology of the gift invites a profound rethinking of the ontological and teleological foundations of economic praxis. It contests the reduction of the economy to a mechanism of competition and accumulation, where human relations are mediated by scarcity and instrumental rationality (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2020; Papilloud, 2004; Tumin et al., 1956; Venema, 2002). Instead, it envisions economic life as a field of intersubjective intentionality, a dynamic network of reciprocity, responsibility, and mutual flourishing.

Through the lens of the gift, the economy is reimagined not as an impersonal system of exchange but as a moral ecology of interdependence, in which human and institutional flourishing coincide. Thus, the phenomenology of the gift restores to economic life its deeper moral vocation: the realization of being-through-others and the cultivation of a shared world

grounded in reciprocity and care. Furthermore, the environmental crisis reflects not just a technological failure but a moral one: humanity's broken relationship with nature. The moral phenomenology of the gift expands reciprocity beyond human society to include the natural world. African.

3.5 Conclusion

This study has shown that the gift, when examined through the dialogue between Marcel Mauss's moral anthropology and Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity, embodies a profound ethical and ontological significance. It has demonstrated that philosophical analysis is essential to capture the intentional, intersubjective, and moral dimensions of giving, which cannot be fully understood through empirical methods alone. It has also indicated that giving, receiving, and reciprocating constitute a lived moral experience that sustains social cohesion. The gift also serves a protective function, responding to human vulnerability and relational dependence. African communitarian ethics, exemplified by Ubuntu and Ujamaa, reinforce that moral obligations are relational: individual dignity and flourishing are inseparable from the well-being of others. Moreover, the gift remains relevant today, offering a framework to reorient social, economic, and ecological relations toward generosity, reciprocity, and shared flourishing. This study therefore concludes that ethical life is fundamentally relational in which human coexistence is realized through moral responsibility, empathy, and recognition of the Other, and the gift exemplifies how these dynamics structure both personal and communal existence.

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