



The World of the Gift

Jacques T. Godbout, Alain C. Caille

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The anthropologist Marcel Mauss, in his famous exploration of the gift in "primitive" and archaic societies, showed that the essential aspect of the exchange of presents involved the establishment of a social tie that bound the parties together above and beyond any material value of the objects exchanged. He argued that these intangible mutual "debts" constituted the social fabric. Godbout and Caillé show that, contrary to the modern assumption that societies function on the basis of market exchange and the pursuit of self-interest, the gift still constitutes the foundation of our social fabric. The authors describe the gift not as an object but as a social connection, perhaps the most important social connection because it creates a sense of obligation to respond in kind. They examine the gift in a broad range of cases such as blood and organ donation; volunteer work; the bonds between friends, couples, and family; Santa Claus; the interaction between performers and their audience; and the relation of the artist to society. Written in an engaging manner, *The World of the Gift* will appeal to anyone who is interested in how the world really operates.

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