

Gift enigma in economic theory

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1. The paradox of gratuity

The purpose of this paper is to explain the existence of a paradox, the paradox of gratuity in economics¹.

To understand this paradox means providing an explanation of why gift is hidden in contemporary society, but (above all) in contemporary economy, when it operates paradoxically in many places of life or of activity of people.

Gift spreads over individual action in the course of the whole life (the gift of birth, the gifts received as children, the gifts that circulate in family, the gifts for conventional celebrations, the inheritance, only to name a few limited examples related to people origin context), but its existence is always denied. And even when gift is, with recalcitrance, recognized, is often devalued.

Once we have solved this mystery, we should reflect on what have been the theoretical and practical consequences of this concealment.

Finally it should be necessary to make clear the importance of the rediscovery of gift not only in social sphere, but also in economic field, with special attention to microeconomic level, alias to its existence within companies.

2. Gift hunting

To find gift in the market, in the sphere of *secondary sociability*, is a hard task, but not impossible. It is easier to find gift in the sphere of *primary sociability*. Primary sociability is the place where the identity of the person has more importance in comparison with the function which the person performs in a social relationship.

It is the place where it counts more who is in question in the social relationship than what is done in the relationship. So it is the place of *personal, strong, affective relationships* (family, friendship, love, club

¹ See Montesi (2007).

activities, associations, etc.). It is a place of individualization and of loving (“*aimance*”)².

What principle governs the sphere of primary sociability? The *principle of loyalty*. What may be the negative consequences of the principle of loyalty? The difficulty to get out of the social bond which can become sticky and oppressive, and the painfulness of exit from the bond³.

One should notice that the relations of primary sociability may be very different.

There are some which can not be chosen and which are vertical and asymmetrical (parents/son/daughters relation; master/slave relation; feudal lord/serf relation).

There are others which are free, horizontal, symmetrical (love and friendship relations).

To get rid of the first category of relations is surely heavier.

Gift can be seen more easily in primary sociability world, because a certain type of gift (the *relational* gift) is a relation-builder.

It is more difficult to discover gift in secondary sociability.

This is the place where the function that is expressed by people matters more than the identity of person entering the social relationship. So it is the place of *impersonal, feeble, anaffective* relations (like a contractual relationship, a bureaucratic relation between citizen and State). It is an icy place of anonymous and liquid relationships and of emotional detachment.

Impersonality is anyway guarantee of universality. Market in fact is driven by economic laws that apply to all, State is led by equality (legal norms apply to everybody)⁴.

What principles govern market and State?

In the market there is the *principle of exit*, namely the ease of entry and exit from a contractual relationship (because it is impersonal) to punish an unfair behaviour or to seek better business conditions, with a gain in efficiency⁵. In the State, in addition to *equality*, there is the *principle of voice*, alias the ability to use one’s own voice to denounce inefficiencies, to participate to public choices, to sanction public behaviours through democratic vote⁶.

Gift has more problems of citizenship in secondary sociability world, because this is a sphere characterized by de-linkage, in which *relational* gift is ostracized.

² See Caillé (2008).

³ See Bruni (2006b), Bruni (2007).

⁴ See Godbout (1993).

⁵ See Hirschman (1970).

⁶ See Hirschman (1970).

2. The definition of gift

But which is the nature of the gift? Can we give a definition?

Very schematically we can say that there are two opposing interpretations of gift: one can be defined *purist*, the other *relational*.

The purist interpretation of gift

Many identify gift with pure altruism, because gift, according to this interpretation, would be, unlike market exchange, a *selfless act* (gift is not moved by calculating reason), a *free act* (gift is done without expectation of return), an *unilateral act* (gift goes one way from the donor to the donee), a *discontinuous act* (gift is an isolated act)⁷.

The typical example of this kind of gift is *charity*: it is a gift made to a single individual, a stranger, with whom I do not get into deep relation, which does not trigger any reciprocity.

Pure gift is a *gift with no return*, which recalls the figure of *sacrifice*, an absolute and irreversible loss⁸.

By whom this interpretation of gift was made and why?

This interpretation of the gift like an “abandonment”, as the banning of the donor from its gift, was made by some French philosophers (J.Derrida and J.L.Marion)⁹ and by the major Western monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) to answer to the frantic need to differentiate gift from market exchange, which is self-interested and claims something back of the same amount. The non-symmetrical and disinterested character are the guarantee of the purity of gift, are the guarantee of no contamination of gift by market exchange.

Which are the most attractive aspects of pure gift?

The fact that pure gift is so adamant, so transparent, so noble, makes it more appealing to common sense.

The fact that pure gift was embraced by all the great Western monotheistic religions has contributed to its legitimacy and diffusion. The great Western monotheistic religions in fact:

⁷ See Montesi (2008), Montesi (2010a).

⁸ See Labate (2004).

⁹ See Derrida (1996), Marion (2001).

1. have universalized the gift in the sense of having theorized and promoted gift to strangers and enemies;
2. have radicalized the gift in the sense that they have legitimized the gift as the ultimate sacrifice of the self (martyrdom);
3. have sentimentalized the gift in the sense that they have theorized the gift as the fruit of love for others and have established the primacy of *agape* (love is not replaceable) on *Eros* and *Philia* (both forms of love based on reciprocity)¹⁰.

But the triumph of pure gift is linked also to a historical trend, is linked to gift evolution in society during the transition from archaic society to modern society¹¹.

The passage from *archaic gift* to *class gift* to *modern gift* can be summarized in:

1. passage from obligation in giving to freedom in giving;
2. extension of gifts (from siblings to strangers);
3. passage from gifts in favour of collective anonymous subjects (class gift) to anonymous single person gift;
4. growth of the importance of unilateral gifts in comparison with relational gift (growth of charity/philanthropy in the unlimited individualism era).

Which are the inconveniences of pure gift?

Pure gift wants to oppose to market exchange, but ends up drawing out the same flaws: individualism and anonymity.

Pure gift requires compliance with requirements so heroic for its existence that flows into impossibility (for this reason pure gift is called the figure of the “impossible”).

Pure gift, because of its attributes, becomes prerogative only of people of the highest nobility of soul (like St. Francis of Assisi). So pure gift becomes ineffable, disembodied, spiritual. Fundamentally it is no longer of this world.

Pure gift does not build social relation, so it can not be placed in the sphere of society, but within affectivity. It is a gift that belongs to the private sphere, to the sphere of feeling. Pure gift becomes an unilateral act of love that is at the discretion of the subject (like charity performed by good heart of the philanthropist).

¹⁰ See Boltanski (1990).

¹¹ See Montesi (2014a).

The relational interpretation of gift

The *relational* interpretation of gift, which was conceived by some eminent anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss¹² and by other scholars such as those belonging to MAUSS (the Movement Antiutilitarian for Social Science)¹³ like A. Caille¹⁴ and J. Godbout¹⁵, refutes all the features of pure gift (gratuity, unilaterality, disinterest, discontinuity).

Is gift really a free act?

Gift is not a free act, because it claims to be reciprocated.

Gift, in most cases, implies reciprocity¹⁶. Gift involves restitution, even if this restitution is a special kind of return, because it is *free*, because it is *far from the equivalence*, because it is *deferred over time*. This means that there is no certain guarantee that restitution will occur, you do not know what amount it will have, nor what form it will take, nor when it will happen. All the opposite of market exchange which is obligated, respectful of equivalence, instant.

Restitution can also take place even if not desired by the donor, it can assume different aspects including immaterial forms (like gratitude), it can often lie in the same action of giving (ie in the simple pleasure of making gift or in the cathartic transformation that occurs in the donor like in the case of organ donations).

Giving make usually people happy because gift corresponds to donor's identity and because gift takes into account the good of the Other, and does not respond to criteria of good education. The "joyless gifts" are those gift which are made to respond to the values of society (culturalism) or to the rules imposed by society (structuralism) or to the functions assigned by society to some subjects (functionalism)¹⁷. These are all *conventional* or *ritual* gifts.

Restitution should not respect equivalence, but it should not deviate too much from it, because a gift that can not be reciprocated humiliates the person who receives it and becomes a form of dominion over people. The value of the thing reciprocated should not be the same as in market exchange, but it should be proportional to the capacity to reciprocate of the

¹² See Mauss (2002).

¹³ See Aime (2002).

¹⁴ See Caillé (1998), Caillé (2008), Caillé (2010).

¹⁵ See Godbout (1993), Godbout (1998a), Godbout (1998b), Godbout (2007).

¹⁶ See Gouldner (1960).

¹⁷ See Lévi-Strauss (1965).

person who receives the gift, according to the principle of “restitution according proportion”. Generally the return is, in sum, very often greater than the gift received, having capitalized the work of gratitude, which takes place over time.

Unlike market exchange where agents are well identified and the contract is valid only with each other, in the case of gift people can often be benefited by gift of anonymous individuals (like in blood gift). The circulation of gifts can in fact take place according to the form of *symmetrical reciprocity* between two people who know each other, or may happen, in a less restricted way, among people who do not know reciprocally, in the manner of *generalized reciprocity*, within networks potentially open to infinite, both from the point of view of space and time¹⁸. Generalized reciprocity in space are anonymous gift made remotely on the basis of the recognition of belonging to human race. Consider the gift of blood or the gift on the occasion of natural disasters¹⁹. Generalized reciprocity in time (which is also called *generalized reciprocity in open chain*) is a form of non-circular transmission over time of goods (such as heredity or environmental goods which are passed down to future generations).

Is gift really an unilateral act?

Gift is not an unilateral act, but it serves to establish or strengthen social relations: the gift creates or feeds an interpersonal relationship between donor and donee, is a catalyst of social ties²⁰. Since archaic societies epoch, where gift was intended to avert war or violence between tribes or clans²¹, until now individuals try, through gift, to “tame each other” (how does the little prince with the fox in the famous tale of *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* “The little Prince”).

In archaic societies gift has a political significance: it is a builder of alliances, it turns enemies into allies (that is why gift is called “*the paradigm of politics*”). Gift is the painless and the most economic substitute of the war²². In archaic societies and /or in exotic societies people compete in generosity and win peacefully over rivals (the *rivalistic gift*, which is relational, it is an instrument of domination and is a symbol of prestige in the positional competition among individuals)²³.

¹⁸ See Bruni (2006a).

¹⁹ See Titmuss (1971).

²⁰ See Donati (2003), Panizza (2003), Zanardo (2007).

²¹ See Mauss (2002).

²² See Bourdieu (1997).

²³ See Malinowski (1978).

Three are the dimensions of archaic gift²⁴:

1. the horizontal and synchronous archaic among peers: women are given brides to enemies to build alliances;
2. the vertical and diachronic gift: women give birth to children to establish alliances between generations;
3. the gift to the gods (*ceremonial gift*): people make gift to nature as a form of gratitude, respect and acknowledgment of belonging to the same cosmic order.

Is gift really a selfless act?

Gift is not a selfless act. There is an interest on the ground of gift: it is to build fraternity. The interest of gift is therefore to establish a relationship between subjects (in this aim resides in the true etymology of the term “interest” which means “inter-esse”, alias to be among the people). The interest of the gift is to build an *authentic* and *balanced* relation between people. The relation must not be instrumental (otherwise we fall in case of instrumental gift, of hypocrite gift), nor a relationship of dominion (otherwise we fall in the rivalistic gift, where the relation is in favour of only one side). So the interest of gift it is to build a friendship of virtue, not of utility, Aristotle would say. Relational gift experience is then placed between the selfish utilitarianism interest and absolute pure altruism.

Is gift really a discontinuous act?

Gift is not an isolated act, but it is a cycle that can be broken down into three stages (give, receive, reciprocate) deferred over time²⁵. The passing of time is at the heart of gift, while instantaneity is the character of the market. The three moments can also be confused logically (in the case of voluntary work, for example, people often give to others because they have already received much from life). Naturally giving is the foundative step of the system and normally precede the other two steps.

Gift lies in a story between people and has memory of the relationship. That is why gift reflects, in addition to exchange value and use value, even the *value of the social bond*. The gift is affected by the length and quality of the relationship. Thus gift has also a *symbolic value*, is the symbol of the relationship which is at its roots (gift is also called “*the paradigm of the symbolic*”).

²⁴ See Lévi-Strauss (1984).

²⁵ See Godbout (2007).

Definition of gift according to the relational interpretation

In light of all these special characteristics relational gift becomes “*a supply of goods or services performed, with no guarantee of return, in order to create or feed the social bond between people*”²⁶.

From this definition we can deduce that gift giving, with no guarantee of being reciprocated, assumes a great trust in the Other (trust is the basis of all civil partnerships and also of the market).

Gift giving, as an unconditional openness to Others, is a mysterious leap into the unknown, in the kingdom of surprise and of life.

On the contrary market, which is governed by the mechanical principle of equivalence, is for this reason predictable. The State is also predictable because obedience to the laws, under the principle of equality, makes the behavior of citizens standardized (apart from the phenomena of social or mental deviance).

Which are the inconveniences of relational gift?

The relational gift is full of ambiguities.

But what are these ambiguities? The ambiguity of the gift relationship can be schematically traced to the fact that:

1. relational gift presupposes reciprocity and this need can annoy for two reasons. The first reason is that the gift is addictive: we like gift, but at the same time gift puts us at the mercy of the Other (in several languages the word *gift* means also *poison*); the second reason is that reciprocity can be easily confused with market exchange and gift then be perceived as “polluted”;
2. gift is a mix of obligation and freedom: on one hand people make gifts to respect the values, the rules, the functions assigned by society, but fortunately there are also free gifts which avoid ritualism; on the other hand people can make also spontaneous gifts which escape determinism, but these kind of gifts risk to fall into social insignificance if not accompanied by conventional gifts;
3. gift is a mix of interest and disinterest, as shown before.

²⁶ See Godbout (1993), p.30.

3. Gift, Political Economy and Economic Science

In which way gift was expelled from economic theory? And what have been the consequences?

Gift was expelled from economic theory because “homo economicus” paradigm, on which economic science has been founded, is incompatible specially with relational gift conception.

“Homo economicus” has unrealistically been portrayed as an agent only individualistic (*refractory to personal, affective and empathic relations*) and selfish (*maximizer of individual utility*). An agent essentially illiterate in emotional field and unable to donative practices²⁷.

The reason for the ostracism of relational and solidaristic dimension in economics are different.

To suppose that an economic agent has only anonymous and impersonal relations with other people, which means he is an *individualist*, has an undoubted advantage: to minimize the importance of social ties in economic transactions can make them be run with greater speed and efficiency as seen before.

To suppose that an economic agent is *selfish* (and thus impervious to gifts) has the advantage of expelling, once again, the relational dimension in economics (because gifts, specially those made in the name of reciprocity, build social bond), allowing the transformation of the economic discipline from a *social* to a *natural* science, with a gain in objectivity and rigor (from *Political Economy* to *Economic Science*)²⁸. In this reconceptualized science can finally be discovered the universal, impersonal, eternal laws of the functioning of economic system under which the future can be predicted²⁹.

The positive consequences of the transition from *Political Economy* to *Economic Science* have been the discovery of some of these laws and the stylization of economic facts into mathematical models of general validity.

The negative consequences have been the excessive mathematization of economics (a tendency that is exacerbated especially in recent years); the neglect, in the name of the quantity, of the qualitative aspects of economic phenomena and of their relational and institutional dimensions; the prevalence of the method on the contents; the excessive reductionism. The relations between men and things have been dissected and also those between people and the means of production (both expressed, respectively,

²⁷ See Montesi (2003).

²⁸ See Sen (2000a). See also Montesi (2000); Montesi (2012a).

²⁹ See Robbins (1932).

through utility function and production function), while relations among men, more difficult to be presented in algorithmic terms, have been forgotten. Thus was sealed the end of Economics as a science of “public happiness” in vogue in the eighteenth century (since happiness depends, among other factors, on *relations* among people) and celebrated the advent of Economics as the “sad” science that must be addressed only to “wealth of nations” (in Adam Smith's thought), to “personal pleasure” (in Jeremy Bentham's thought), to “individual utility” (in neoclassical economists’ thinking). From the research of well-being (not just economic) in a community’s dimension, Economics has been driven by neoclassical economists of twentieth century to deal with only *material consumption at individual level*. The coming of “homo economicus” paradigm has thus collimated with the sunset, in a single shot, of happiness, gift and even women from the horizon of Economics (especially since women have more attitude to relations and embody and practice gift paradigm par excellence³⁰). The practical consequences of the twilight of gift and of relational goods in Economic Science have been the unsustainable economic, social and environmental impact of growth model (including the tragedy of the commons³¹), although the economic crisis and all the recent scientific work of discovery of gift and of the relational perspective in Economics³² are respectively an opportunity and a tool for challenging the current scientific symbolic order³³.

What space does still exist for gift in Economic Science?

Given the characteristics of “homo oeconomicus” paradigma (an individualist and a selfish man) and given the different notions of gift, it can be observed that:

1. Individualism is not compatible with relational gift, but is consistent with pure gift;
2. Selfishness is not compatible with relational gift and with pure gift, while is consistent with instrumental gift.

So it can be deduced that:

1. instrumental gift is compatible with “homo oeconomicus” paradigma, but its lack of authenticity weakens its consistency;

³⁰ See Vaughan (2004b) and Kailo (2004).

³¹ See Montesi (2013).

³² See Sacco and Zamagni (2006).

³³ See Montesi (2010c).

2. pure gift would be compatible with “homo oeconomicus” paradigm, being its more direct antagonist, but pure gift does not exist in reality, because of its “impossibility”;
3. relational gift is the most irreconcilable with “homo oeconomicus” paradigm, who is lacking in sociability.

Given the incompatibility between gift and “homo oeconomicus” paradigm, where is then placed gift spatially and temporally in Economic Science?

Spatially, gift has theoretical citizenship only *outside the market*:

1. gift has been relegated to the sphere of primary sociability (family, friends, associations), where it has been studied only by some social sciences (sociology, anthropology, ethnology, psychology, philosophy);
2. gift has been confined to the sphere of non-profit organizations (as an exception to the market), a world that has forced economists to question gift enigma to explain at least the origin and the mode of operating of this sector.

Temporally, a chronological discrepancy between gift and market has been legitimized and this reconfirms, on an other dimension, the fracture still existing between the two:

1. gift should act, through philanthropy, downstream, or only after the market has produced wealth, making a partial correction of inequalities that may have been generated by the market (in a complementary way with the redistributive function of Welfare State in the name of fairness).

4.The actual challenge: to catch the presence of gift inside the market

The actual challenge is to catch gift presence in the market, not *out of* the market and *not after* the market, but *inside* the market.

This perspective has emerged only recently thanks to the discovery of “Civil Economy”³⁴, whose historical roots dip into the Middle Ages (more particularly in the Franciscans and Benedectine tradition) and in the Civil Humanism of fourteenth and fifteenth century (Coluccio Salutati, Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo Bruni, Leon Battista Alberti, Matteo Palmieri) with ramifications that reach the Italian Enlightenment with the Milan school (Ludovico Muratori, Pietro Verri) and the Neapolitan school (Paolo Mattia Doria, Antonio Genovesi).

³⁴ See Bruni and Zamagni (2004), Bruni and Zamagni (2009).

All these scholars emphasize the importance of social relations, which are based on gift and reciprocity, for the edification of the city, in which markets are embedded.

So gift becomes the prerequisite of the market, besides the prerequisite of the civil society. In building social bonds, gift indeed gives rise to those forms of acknowledgment that are at the foundation of the community and, therefore, also of the market, which is part of them. The market begins, among other things, from an original gift: the gift of trust³⁵. Marcel Mauss writes about it: “In all the societies that have preceded us and in all the societies which still surround us, and also in many customs associated with our popular morality, there is no middle way: to trust or distrust entirely”³⁶. Market can start to run only from what Alain Caille call the “conditional unconditionality”. According to Caille no contracts, no alliances can be generated without a minimum of plausible hope that the other will be able to give what is necessary in case of need or request³⁷. No union can be formed or could hold a moment. But this unconditional opening, essential to reach at least the contractual phase, is not permanent, but is subject to a condition: that, once entered into the contract, trust will not be betrayed. In this case, since the contracting parties are free to terminate the contract, the alliance will end.

But gift is essential to the birth not only of the market, but also of some companies (consider, for example, the role of gifts in family for the start-up of family-business³⁸). Without strong social bonds, built by gift, market could not rise, but neither work, according to the classical authors of anthropological research on gift and according to the more recent exponents of the “social construction of the market”, based on the study of the Italian industrial district³⁹. Gift is therefore not only a prerequisite to the market, but also serves as a lubricant of the market. Reinforcing “social capital” through gift make transaction costs and the risk of opportunisms become lower. Gift may also remedy some market failures like situations of information asymmetry between economic agents (specially the case of hidden information).

³⁵ See Heinemann (1989).

³⁶ See Mauss (2002), pp.137-138.

³⁷ See Caillé (1998), p.122.

³⁸ See Montesi (2012b).

³⁹ See Bagnasco (1998), Bagnasco and Trigilia (1984).

5. Gift in Economic Theory

Deconstruction of “homo oeconomicus” paradigm

The rediscovery of gift reaffirms the rift between abstraction and reality, with a gain of truth and an increase in awareness about the inadequacy of “homo economicus” paradigm.

“Homo economicus” is in fact portrayed as a rational agent, but gift shows us that man is capable of actions that are the result of spontaneity and sentiments, not only of calculated choices.

“Homo economicus” is represented as an agent whose actions are in line with his goals, but in gift the relationship “means/ends” is absolutely not known a priori: in making a gift you do not have the certainty that it will be reciprocated.

“Homo economicus” is depicted as an agent only self-interested (guided only by instrumental rationality), but gift debunks this sad connotation of misanthropy. Gift testifies that actions can be guided by feelings of benevolence towards people (think of the gifts to strangers) or by moral convictions (by a rationality according to values)⁴⁰.

More Capacity of interpretation of economic phenomena

Gift widens the concepts of economy: we have *public* economy and *market* economy which can be divided into two branches: *private and civil*.

Gift widens the conceptions of economic goods with the notion of *relational goods*, to which gift, for its characteristics, belong. Relational goods are characterized mainly by the fact that the relationship between individuals is constitutive of the good, by the fact that there is a selfless motivation at the root of the relation, by the fact that in the relation is important the identity of the persons who are involved⁴¹. Gift implies or even creates a social bond, is a free act, meets people’s need for acknowledgment (it is called for this reason “*the acknowledgment paradigm*”). Gift makes unique the donor, as well as the beneficiary. Gift reflects the personality of the donor, incorporates his “spirit” (the *hau* studied by Mauss), but it takes into account also the preferences of the donee.

Gift widens the concepts of value: *exchange value, use value, link value*.

⁴⁰ See Zamagni (2002), Zamagni (2007).

⁴¹ See Donati and Solci (2011).

Gift widens the forms of economic regulation, beyond market and State, including an other principle after market exchange and redistribution: *reciprocity*⁴².

6. Gift in company

Gift permeates, as an intangible factor, companies operating within the *organizational capital*. The functioning of the company, as a set of contracts, would be impossible if only conceived as a literal application of the contract by the worker. Think of Akerlof's interpretation of labour relation as "partial gift exchange"⁴³. And that work is not limited to the minimum contractually required, but exceeds the quantity corresponding to equilibrium wage, is a circumstance observed also by Marcel Mauss in his "Essay on the gift", when he says that the worker "has always felt, but this time more sharply, to give in return something that is more of a product or a work time; he wants to give something of himself, his time, his life, and wants to be rewarded, albeit moderately, for this gift. To refuse such a reward is equivalent to incite him to laziness and to the minimum return"⁴⁴. But even if the firm is conceived not as a set of contracts, but like an organization, its functioning can not be explained in terms of mere compliance of the hierarchy by the worker. In companies there are in circulation a series of performances which have the connotation of the gift. The success of Japanese company is largely based on its community spirit, that is continuously fed by gifts and that is connected to the importance of the gift in that society⁴⁵.

But gift also can improve the functioning of the component of *human capital*. The making of gifts by manager to employees, if not paternalistic or instrumental, and if it takes place once ensured fair treatment of workers, can help to increase, in addition to other forms of share-economy, the involvement and the motivation of employees, which are crucial in an organizational context that requires increasing collaboration and work team. Gift creates social link and contributes to the construction of corporate citizenship, while traditional monetary incentives tend rather to produce a displacement of intrinsic motivations of the employee towards work. Furthermore, the quantity/quality of the skills and abilities of employees can be increased through the gift of knowledge. Learning, which

⁴² See Polanyi (1974), Cella (1997).

⁴³ See Akerlof (1982).

⁴⁴ See Mauss (2002), p.133.

⁴⁵ See Dore (1990).

is the basis of “Knowledge Economy”, is a social process that is based on the free transmission of knowledge that improve the human capital of the company. Creativity and intuition, so important for innovation, should be considered a precious gift for the company like artistic creation⁴⁶.

Finally, gift can even increase the company's competitiveness in various modalities. Gift is present in the informal relationships inside and outside the enterprise, in the *relational capital*, that are strategic for the continuous improvement of quality and innovation, which are a source of competitive advantage. Quality and innovation, especially incremental innovation, require free passage of information, implicit and explicit knowledge among individuals, among companies, between companies and institutions.

A second way to increase the company's competitiveness is an instrumental use of the gift at the service of the market.

Gift may infact contribute to the achievement of market share especially in the case of the launch of a new product (think of the free samples distributed to customers as in the case of perfumes or drugs). Gift may also increase market power as many marketing strategies have shown, like in the case of bundled sales or free distribution of some goods that are useful to the affirmation, on the market, of a dominant product (strategy that is particularly widespread in the context of the “New Economy” and among consumers who are able to use ICT, namely the Information and Communication Technologies).

Sometimes gift relates to goods and services on the Internet, always offered free of charge to the public. Even in other types of ICT is widespread this gift practice: consider the case of some models of mobile phones given away to customers as long as they sign a service contract (commercial tying).

Sometimes gift can serve to consolidate market share by encouraging customer's loyalty with gifts, as often happens in the retail trade or in retail distribution of fuels.

But the gift can become a factor of competitive advantage because an altruistic orientation of the company, which may materialize in the practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR), social marketing, ethical finance, can differentiate the brand, improve corporate reputation with all direct and indirect benefits associated with it⁴⁷, improve relations with

⁴⁶ See Hyde (1983).

⁴⁷Reputation can improve business ratings, raise share values, solve information problems between company and customers/suppliers or relative to contractual incompleteness and contractual uncertainty.

citizens, institutions and natural environment. Again, however, CSR can be more effective if paradoxically it is not so much the fruit of *opportunism* (ie the consequence of the calculation of the undoubted advantages of the market that CSR objectively manifests) or the fruit of *legal coercion* or the fruit of *civil or political pressures*, but the fruit of *conscious choice*, even if the different modes can coexist with each other in the frame of Civil Economy and in a Civil Company⁴⁸. In the long run, in a climate of widespread confidence, the values represented by CSR could be internalized in the intrinsic motivation of the owners/managers/employees, transforming businesses companies oriented exclusively to profit into “companies oriented to an ideal motive”⁴⁹. They should become much more competitive thanks to this genuine moral enthusiasm.

7. Conclusion

While it is now taken for granted the importance of gift in the field of anthropology and social matters (acting as a valid alternative between methodological individualism and holism), the necessity of its revelation in economic field is less recognized.

Yet this discovery could be precious not only for an increase of the interpretative capability of some economic phenomena, but also from the anthropological point of view, for a change of the “idea of man” underlying economic science. *Homo reciprocans* could serve as alternative paradigm to “homo oeconomicus” selfishness of private economy and to the obliged and bureaucratic solidarity of Welfare State. *Homo reciprocans* has preceded historically “homo economicus” facilitating its coming and, fortunately, is not yet extincted: “Our Western societies have transformed, only very recently, a man into an economic animal. The man was for a long time different, and only recently has become a machine, even a calculating machine”⁵⁰.

At microeconomic level gift is working in organizational, human, relational capital and in many coexisting forms (relational, pure, instrumental gifts). Gift can also change the “modus operandi” inside and outside companies. Gift can modify the relationship between capital and labour, overcoming both the social antagonistic paradigm of Marxian matrix both the individualistic and contrattualistic paradigm of liberalism and establishing forms of cooperation between the two productive inputs. Gift can also lead

⁴⁸ See Bruni (2009).

⁴⁹ See Gui (2000).

⁵⁰ See Mauss (2002), pp.131-132.

firms to take into account, in making their business, in addition to profit, of other variables of collective interest and to activate relations of cooperation with various actors based, above all, on the gift of knowledge⁵¹.

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⁵¹ See Montesi (2014b).

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